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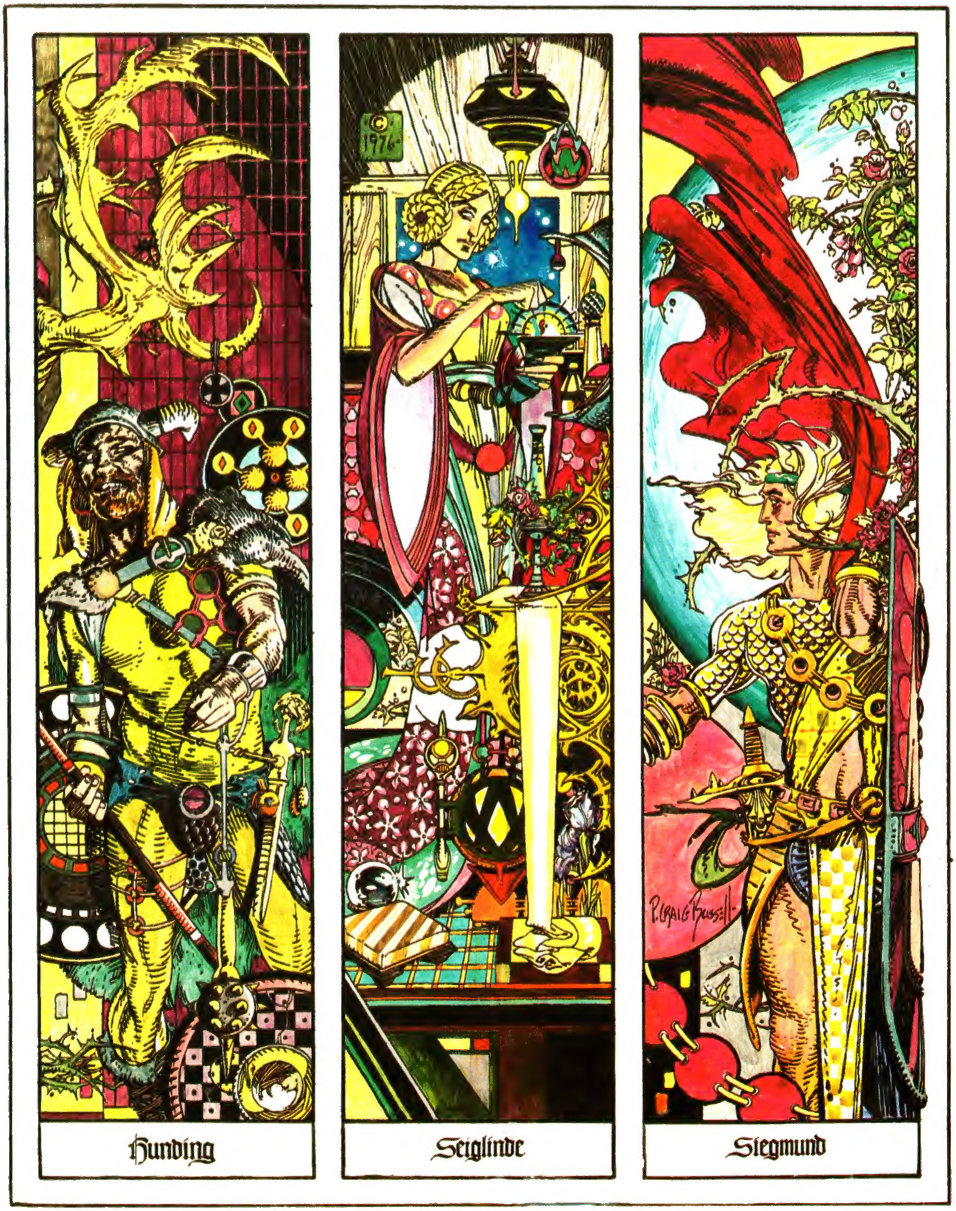

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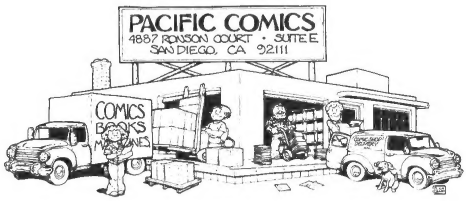

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Special thanks to Cecila Lewis and the Cattleman Restaurant and to David Forshtay for agreeing to pose. Photo by Robert S. Schaffer.

The cover features Craig Russell's first coloured version of the *Siegmund Trilogy*, first published (in black and white) in the *Curse of the Ring* portfolio. This piece was damaged by a snowball that curved its way into Craig's studio and exploded. Craig did not realize the piece had been damaged, and returned, to his horror, to see some lovely colours dripping down his wall. Craig graciously offered to re-colour this piece for our cover.

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EDITORIAL

"SO LONG ALREADY ARTIE"

I never was very good at goodbyes. It's one of the reasons why I have to struggle to get to places on time. Y'see it's not that I don't want to be punctual, it's just that I have such a hard time leaving . . .

Goodbyes are just not my forte.

About a year ago I took over the editorial reins of a magazine still in the planning stages. With more enthusiasm than contributers, more inspiration than budget and more idealistic goals than experience, I applied myself to the sometimes overwhelming task of creating a magazine.

It's up to you to judge the results of my efforts. All I know is that despite the hardships, the unfulfilled promises and the ridiculously long days, I can still look back at the experience and smile.

It's almost impossible to thank the legions of people who deserve my gratitute. Take a quick look at the length of the list of contributors on the contents page if you want some measure as to the enormity of such a task. The limits of space permit me to only single out a few.

Don McGregor was the first regular contributor to commit himself to the magazine. He took a big chance when he agreed to work for an unknown product and an admitedly inexperienced editor. I thank him for taking that risk, for his honesty and for the quality of the perceptions in his columns over the past year. It's been a pleasure to be a part of bringing those features to you.

To put it simply: Without Dean Mullaney's help, I would not have been able to put together the first issue. Faced with an impossible deadline, with my time and attention divided between the magazine and the completion of a previous project, I might have been in over my head. But Dean was always able, on a moments notice to provide a contact, a helpful suggestion or an encouraging word, despite his working for a competitor at the time.

Last year, I spent a productive summer with Owen Long, as together we formulated the direction and look of **The Comic Times**. Ever ready with intelligent suggestions and honest comments, Owen made it really nice to spend all of those working hours in the cramped, decaying confines of the old office.

A budget cut forced us to move out of the lower Broadway office in November. Most of the fourth issue was compiled in my room, out in the furthest reaches of Queens. Among the close friends who paid me visits to help get the issue out was Andre Gordon. His only payment was the Rolling Rock beer to keep us awake through the endless evenings and the bottle of Jack Daniels to keep us warm as we sat in our overcoats in my unheated room.

I also want to thank Dennis Cieri for giving me this opportunity and for letting me have my own way most of the time and Dan Perkins, Tom Orzechowski and Steve Man Kong for their help and support throughout the past year. Finally a special thank you to Yiota for putting up with my manic moods and with my breaking more dates than she would care to remember.

Our lead feature this issue is the lengthy in-depth examination of one of the few true artist in the comic art field. In "Cinematic Symbolism: The Art of P. Craig Russell", Robert S. Schaffer offers a critical overview of the Russell canon, as he traces the artistic roots integral to the development of Russell's individual approach to the graphic story form.

From the article's inception, Bob's approch was different from similar pieces in that he maintained this focus upon the strength and the subtleties of Russell's imagery and storytelling choices rather than concentrating upon the literary successes or inadequacies of the stories themselves. The result is an attempt at an analysis of P. Craig Russell as an artist exploring both the potential and limitations of comics as he tries to apply the richness and vitality of a number of fine art movements to what had been regarded until quite recently as the lowest form of mass entertainment.

In a nutshell, Bob took on a helluva task.

Originally planned for a mere 24 pages, the article kept growing, seeminly out of control, as both Bob and I wanted to present the best possible pictorial examples of his comments. Despite its length we found ourselves reluctantly cutting illustrations and commentary to make it fit in one issue.

If you would like to see a longer version of this article or a series of similar articles on other artists (which I have been prodding Bob to do for months), drop Bob a line in care of this magazine. A lot of work went into this one and he would welcome some feedback.

In the meantime enjoy the P. Craig Russell cover (presented in print for the first itme in recolored form) and our special, bonus pull-out poster.

Also in this issue is an excerpt from Don McGregor's new novelette **The Variable Syndrome**. Although confronted with an extremely tight deadline, Tom Sutton has graciously provided us with his own artistic interpretation of the story. I've admired the scope and complexity of Tom's work for years and I'm quite pleased to have the opportunity to present some of that work to you.

Again I'm forced by space limitations to refrain from commenting on some of our other features. But I hope you enjoy both the articles orginally intended for issue six that are finally seeing publication here and our expanded selection of comic strips.

By now, you may be wondering about the title for this piece. For all I know you may have given up somewhere in the middle of all this and turned the page. For those hardly souls still with me, let me explain.

Remember when I mentioned that I'm terrible at goodbyes in the beginning? Well, this editorial is goodbye. Y'see this is my last issue. Next month I'm resuming my pursuit of a career as a professional film, stage and TV director, which is what I intended to do in the first place.

John Warner will be editing the next issue. Scuttlebutt has it that he has a bunch of exciting features planned, So stick with **Medle Showcase**, I don't think you'll be disappointed.

Now, about that strange title . . . **So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright** was one of the last songs that Simon and Garfunkel recorded. A quiet melody with intricately coordinated production, it was written as a memorial to the late American archetect.

At the end of the song, Art Garfunkel in wonderfully understated omniscience, begins a refrain of "So long . . . .So long" as a sort of final farewell to the inspirational figure. The refrain repeats itself over and over, exemplifying the amazing control and technical perfection that the singing duo and producer Roy Halee were always able to maintain over their recordings.

Well, perhaps the recording session had dragged on for a bit too long and everyone was tired or perhaps it was simply the appropriate time for a practical joke. Whatever the reason, on one take, smack in the middle of the fourth, delicate "So long . . . .So long", Simon and Halee screamed out "So long already Artie!" at a shocked singer. Ever the professional, Garfunkel retained his cool, kept his beat and continued singing "So long . . . .So long" on cue through the end of the song.

As history would have it, this is the take that made it to the final record. If you own **Bridge Over Troubled Water** and listen closely, you can distinctly hear Simon and Halee chiding Garfunkle to sign off already.

So, "So long already Artie!", it's time for me to sign off and move on.

Hey, if anyone out there needs a film, video or theatre director, give me a call. I'm available.

Goodbye, it's been fun.

Gee, that wasn't so hard, was it?

Stay loose,

Mark Gasper

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LETTERS

Dear Dennis (if I may),

Forgive me for not writing this letter sooner, but I only became aware of the Steve Englehart interview in CT #2 just this afternoon. I don't generally follow the fan press, and it was only by accident that I happened to come across this article. Naturally, considering the attack upon my integrity contained in Steve's ravings, I felt I had to respond.

Let's see. In words of one syllable, so that even Steve the Comics Guru can understand: Steve Englehart is a lying fuck. The "conversation" he quoted, in which I said—according to Sterling Steve—"I wrote the *Justice League* at National, I'm the editor at Marvel now, and I want the Avengers," simply never took place. Steve is a liar. That's spelled l-i-a-r, Steve. As in full of shit. As in out of your fucking mind.

I came to Marvel as Editor-in-Chief in April of '76, upon Roy Thomas's recommendation to Stan Lee. I left four weeks later, and remained at Marvel for another five months as a writer-editor; then I quit and moved to DC as a writer. Those are the plain, public domain facts. When I became Editor-in-Chief at Marvel, I knew I would have some problems with, among other people, Steve Englehart, Marv Wolfman and Len Wein, and I made it a point to call each of these people and assure them that I wasn't after their turf. I called Steve the day I was asked to take the job. I spent over an hour on the phone assuring him that I wasn't interested in interfering with his work on the creative level, and Steve seemed reassured by my assurances. A few days later, John Verporten informed me that Steve was incredibly late with plots for Avengers—so late that George Perez would be unable to do both the regular book and the special annual scheduled for that summer. I called Steve at the office, with both John and Jim Shooter—then my assistant—present in my office. I asked Steve to make a deal with me to deliver the necessary plots by a specific date—of *his* chosing. He agreed, and I told him that the plots *must* be in by that date, or we would have to take the annual away and have it plotted by somebody else—probably *me*—or George would be unable to do either the annual or the regular book. Those were the facts, as Joe Friday might say; plain and simple, Steve Englehart agreed to meet a deadline in order to keep George Perez working on the Avengers annual.

The day came and went when the plots were due. I gave Steve an additional twenty-four hours grace, and then called him. Steve told me he was just getting down to finishing the Avengers annual plot—and this was *two days* after the plot was due in the office. I reminded Steve of the deal we made. Steve professed total ignorance of any deal; this, *despite* the fact that I had two witnesses. I told him that I would have to take the Avengers annual away, but that he could continue to write the regular book; I did this because George Perez needed the work right *then*, not two days later, not a week later—*right then*. Apparently Steve can't understand that in a collaborative medium, one has responsibilities to the other people one works with.

In a fit of childish pique, Steve told me that if he couldn't write the Avengers annual, he would quit Marvel altogether. I said, Steve, what are you telling me? That you have the right to change the rules midway through the game, and when I hold you to your agreements, you threaten to take your marbles and go home? I couldn't work like that. I asked Steve to reconsider, but he wouldn't; he quit, and that was that.

Not once in the entire sequence of events, did I ever say to Steve that I wanted to write the Avengers for my own personal glory. The book I wanted to write at Marvel was *Spider-Man*, and certainly, if I was going to throw my weight around and act as capriciously as Steve says, I would have taken *Spider-Man* away from Len Wein, along with *Fantastic Four* and *Hulk* and *Thor*, all books that I had previously written, and which I enjoyed doing. I had *never* written the Avengers and didn't feel comfortable doing so; Roy Thomas will confirm that I offered the book to *him* before taking it myself. So much for Steve Englehart's lies.

That's what they are—pathological lies designed to make Steve look like the Suffering Martyr he wishes he was. The truth is that Steve Englehart quit Marvel because he refused to abide by his agreements. He quit because his ego became so large, he could no longer stand the idea that anyone had any authority over him. I will not deny that Steve Englehart is one of the best writers this field has produced; but he isn't *the* best—and Steve thinks he is. That sort of ego inevitably leads to delusions of grandeur, and just plain self-delusion. Steve has deluded himself into believing that I forced him to quit by taking the Avengers away from him for my own glorification. More on that later . . .

Other lies in Steve's interview: he says that I took away Gerber's *Defenders* and cancelled both of McGregor's books. In the first place, I didn't take The Defenders from Steve—Archie Goodwin did. Englehart seems to forget that Archie was Editor-in-Chief when Gerber was taken off that book; the fact that Defenders was then given to me is pure coincidence, though I needed a book to fill out my quota for Marvel. As for cancelling both of McGregor's books—another lie. I took Don off *Black Panther* but left him on his other book; the only reason I took him off *Panther* was because the book was selling terribly. Maybe the fan press believes in charity, but I doubt it. If *Detectives Inc.* sells as badly, proportionately, as did McGregor's *Black Panther*, I doubt there'll be a second McGregor book. (Actually I think *Detectives Inc.* will do quite well in the fan market, and maybe the *Panther* would have done equally well with a miniscule print-run and no color, but that's not the kind of book we were publishing, and Don just couldn't sell the kind of book the *Panther* was.) I can't understand why the fans think a comic book publisher should subsidize a poor-selling title simply because a few hundred or a few thousand people think it's god's gift to the English language. Even assuming they're right, which I doubt, there are other kinds of publishing better suited to reaching that audience than the commercial comic book company.

Now for the final lie. He says that Starlin quit during my three weeks, and implies that it was my fault. Again, this is bullshit. Starlin indeed insists that it was my fault he quit Marvel—but on what basis? The fact is, Jim quit over the production work that had been done on a *Warlock* issue that had just arrived in make-ready form at the office when I was hired. All of that production work had been done by Marv Wolfman's team *before* I came to Marvel. Starlin called me in a snit and demanded

GERRY CONWAY ANSWERS STEVE ENGLEHART

LETTERS

that I make him the editor of *Warlock* right then and there; when I pointed out that I'd only been Editor-in-Chief for two weeks, and asked him to give me a chance to correct the production problems that had upset him—*Starlin quit*. I never had the chance to fuck Jim Starlin. Maybe I would have—if there's one thing I cannot stand it's self-righteous clowns who think they're the only people with any integrity—but the fact is, I didn't do it. I didn't have the time to do it. Jim Starlin quit because Jim Starlin wanted to quit, and it had nothing to do with me—except possibly that he wanted to "punish" me and Marvel for treating poor Steve Englehart so "unfairly." That may be your idea of maturity, but it sure as hell isn't mine.

Lastly, the bottom-line implication of Steve's interview is that I acted for my own glorification, and that I was power-mad, willing to do anything to assure my control over Marvel and its people

How many times do I have to say it? *Bullshit*

If I was so power mad, I wouldn't have quit the job after only four weeks. Englehart's pathological manuverings, Starlin's childish snit, McGregor's agony—all of it depressed me so much, I decided I had to leave that job before it drove me mad. The idea that I would have to deal with babies like these for the rest of my professional career, if I remained Editor-in-Chief, sickened me. So I quit. So much for power-mad Conway. He was so mad for power, he forgot to hold onto it.

I remained at Marvel for five more months for one reason only—I felt an obligation to Stan Lee for giving me the chance to be Editor-in-Chief, and I felt I had to make restitution by trying to fit into the Marvel editor-writer arrangement. It didn't work; I didn't like the way things were shaping up, with my friends—like Steve Gerber—wrongly blaming me for things that happened to them. Finally, I left and, returned to DC, taking a position as a writer and putting behind me all the politics and games that people like Englehart seem so to relish.

Steve Englehart has dined out on his martyrdom story for five years now. I've never bothered to respond to it before, because it was never as blatant and as calumnious as it was in this interview. It's sad, really, that the fans accept this garbage as anything other than what it obviously is—sick and pompous self-aggrandizement, designed to appeal to the worst instincts of the fan world. Steve Englehart plays his audience the way Itzhak Perlman plays his violin. Perhaps it's time for the fans to wake up and realize they're being lied to by someone who is *not* a god, who is as capable of pettiness and error as his enemies, whose smiling exterior conceals a viciousness as black as that of a Richard Nixon, and ill-deserves their worship, nevermind their continued fawning support

Gerry Conway

To all concerned

I have been a comic dealer for fifteen years. What started as a bit of small-time dealings with other collectors (via the *Blackhawk* back-issue page) has given way to a full-time occupation. What I pursued as a hobby has now become a way of life, and as much of what I know has been learned first-hand as has been gleaned from articles in fanzines, correspondence with collectors, and discussions in my store. And after five years of full-time retailing, a letter such as the one by Jim Vadeboncoeur' really smarts. I read his letter in *Media Showcase* #5 with a feeling of alarm ...and rising hackles Good God, Jim, don't lay it on *all* of us! Better, perhaps, to be specific and risk a libel suit, but I should think that another irresponsible Werthamesque attack on comics (dealers, in this case) is unnecessary.

To get to the point: yes, Overstreet's Comic Book Price Guide *does* reflect price fluctuations based on artistic content! Most current comic collectors may see this example most graphically illustrated in the pricing of comics drawn by Neal Adams. An Adams comic usually commands a price several times higher than an equivalent number, and even *reprints* of Adams stories sometmes fetch more. This is all well and good, as it reflects demand I certainly find reprints worth no more than equivalent counterparts, and while some of those ridiculous "one-panel" guest shots by big-name artists are worth noting (if only for their novelty), they are hardly worth pricing-up. But the process isn't so easily curtailed. It still comes down to demand

Demand dictates price. Or, in some cases, *manipulation* dictates price. But where the latter is underhanded inflation by well-prepared speculators, the former is honest-to-goodness pricing based on current collecting trends. And such pricing is not always up; demand *has* brought some prices down, and many have stayed the same for several years. Adams art *does* increase in value because the demand for his work attracts collectors. Byrne, too, is developing a following, and his earlier work is being sought after by more collectors. And an increase in collectors of certain comics—be they first issues, rarities, or whatever—means an increased difficulty in obtaining such issues, for collectors and dealers alike. Sure, you want to complete this collection or that collection. But if three people want something there are only two of, eventually the copies are going to belong to the people willing to pay the most.

And what about "trends"? How many of you are stuck with odd smatterings of Frazetta's work in comics? How many of you have collections made up of good girl art, or bondage covers? And will these be worth your investment ten years from now? I wouldn't want to hazard a guess. And now we have the art of L. B Cole. (How many of you had even heard of him five years ago?) Will comics drawn by Mr. Cole be worth their investment in years to come, or is this an example of what Jim's letter compalined of: dealer price-jacking? Time will tell.

It is up to comic collectors, not dealers, to control prices. Smart collectors should use common-sense, not blind faith. Al Williamson's art *is* worth more to some collectors; Jack Kirby's is worth less to some. And it should also be pointed out that collectors are fickle. Wrightson's *Swamp Thing* issues can usually be had for less now than when he was at his peak while producing comics. And *Howard the Duck* isn't quite the rage at the moment (but the renewed comic series may change all that!).

I resent the broad accusation that comic dealers are *all* responsible for hiking up comics containing art by certain comic artists. The statement is rather absurd in view of the fact the *all* comics are drawn by one artist or another. And I'm about ready to believe that sooner or later all of the artists will be identified and listed in the Price Guide (despite Jim's "private" Atlas index) But not every artist is in demand, and not even the best comic market manipulators can accomplish such a "craze." If collectors want art by Colan, or Craig, or Trimpe, then by all means let them collect it. And if an index exists to help them achieve this end, then more power to the person who makes it available to collectors. And if a dealer wants to use an index to mark up comics with Steve Ditko art, well by God that's his right! But he won't sell the comics one way or another, for $1 or $100, unless somebody wants them. Therein lies the key: if you don't want it, *don't buy it!* If a dealer tells you to stock up on *Godzilla* #1 because it's going to go up, use a little common sense. Watch the market. Ask around. But do it because you want to. If you like Don Heck's art, then go ahead and collect it. And if the price goes up, decide for yourself if you should buy more of the issues you need. Maybe it *is* dealer manipulation. But maybe it's not

One final word.

Indexes and the dissemination of information are vital to comic collectors, particularly those who collect comics for art's

LETTERS

sake, not for financial reward. And those who perform the thankless (but personally satisfying) task of compiling such indices should be encouraged to continue their work. The overlooked researchers should be praised for their efforts—not condemned! So thanks, Doug Murray, Raymond Miller, Ron Cohn, Mike Nolan, Maurice Horn, Jerry Bails, Hames Ware, Jim Vadeboncoëur, and the other unmentioned indexers. Keep up the good work.

Rickey L. Shanklin

Dear Editor:

In reference to the closing section of Don McGregor's column in the March issue: If McGregor ever wishes to comment on my reviews in the future, please inform him that my byline is R. Fiore. That is R as in repugnant, period as in F period B period I period, F as in fiendish, I as in ignominious, O as in obtuse, R as in rapacious, E as in execrable. Refusing to mention the name of a subject when engaging in non-libelous criticism is chickenshit (this is the guy whose major theme is machismo?). However, neglecting to give names and examples while criticizing others for not giving examples does show an impressive talent for self-contradiction

Many have questioned McGregor's ability to write simple English, but judging by his comments on my review of P. Craig Russel's *Night Music*, I begin to wonder if he can read it. McGregor implies that I said that the artwork in *Night Music* was beautiful but nonetheless wasted. In fact, these comments were in reference to a five-page squib at the back of the book, not the book as a whole; the word "wasted" was used as a technical term, not a value judgement, and in any event I said that the weaknesses in the structure were mitigated by the loveliness of the images, not that the loveliness was wasted. My actual judgement of the book was that it was flawed but still more interesting than what the major companies were putting out. Now, I would not go so far as to say that McGregor was lying on purpose, for as we all know, Don McGregor is an honorable man. Let's just say he wasn't paying close attention. *Honi soit* and all that.

At any rate, I'm not all that concerned about defending my opinions, opinions being like appendices in that everyone has more than they actually need. I do feel compelled to answer McGregor's attacks on my personal integrity. His charges are, essentially, that I capriciously dismissed Russel's work without evidence, that I gave no constructive criticism, and that I irresponsibly denigrated the artist. The remarks he objected to were these: "...Russel hasn't quite mastered the silent (comic strip) medium. Where in a conventional strip a single panel must be the equivalent of a word, in a silent strip a panel must be the equivalent of a sentence. Russel's pacing in "La Sonnambula (in the City of Sleep)" is conventional, and thus there are a lot of wasted and repeated images. Wasted or not, the images are all lovely, and this tends to make up for it." This is an argument, not an opinion. The basic assumption is that silent strips should be handled differently from conventional ones, and the premise is that Russel hasn't adapted his style sufficiently. While examples would certainly have strengthened the argument, it can easily be tested by looking at the story itself, since the reasoning behind it is plain. Though I think that "constructive" criticism is presumptuous (I wouldn't tell Russel how to do his business, I just say what I think of it after it's done), I did suggest that "Breakdown on the Starship Remembrence" should have had one ending instead of two, that Russel should tailor the content of his stories to what he wants to draw, and that he should work on improving his silent strip style. He didn't think much of any of them. As for proper respect for the artist, I offer two quotes. One from the opening of the *Night Music* review in question: "Russel has digested all the divergent comics techniques developed in the last 30 years and combined them in a style that is not wholly integrated and all his own." If that isn't respect, it's not a poke in the eye with a sharp stick either. The other is from a letter from Russel, who is perfectly capable of defending himself: "Though I obviously disagree with many of Fiore's conclusions I must say he stated them without rancor or invective...I feel Fiore misinterpreted much of the book but that he wrote honestly.

McGregor questions what right I have and what qualifications I have to write about comics in general and Russel's work in particular. I have never claimed to be anything but a reasonably well read reader of comics with a certain verbal facility. My arguments are to be judged on their validity as arguments and not on their source. If the opinion of a non-artist is worthless, then the opinions of ninety percent of your audience is worthless (But then, an audience of toadies might be exactly what McGregor wants.) McGregor asks what beauty I've created in my life. As it happens, I'm not in the beauty business, I'm in the printing/typography/photo-reproduction business. Though I wouldn't make a big deal out of it myself, I have had a part in the manufacture of textbooks, buildings, printed circuits and airplanes. As McGregor assumes that anything other than the creation of art (that McGregor approves of) is insignificant we can add contempt for useful labor to cowardice, hypocrisy and mendacity on McGregor's list of sins (a few more columns and we can probably pin greed, sloth and the rest of the gang on him) My only qualification for writing about P. Craig Russel's work is that I'm an admirer of P. Craig Russel. I thought *Parsifal*, which came before *Night Music*, was a fine book, and I think *Elric*, which came after, is the best visualization of Michael Moorcock's work (with the possible exception of James Cawthorn's). Rightly or wrongly, I tried to judge *Night Music* on the high standards that Russel himself has set. I find McGregor's contention that anything that brings beyootee into the world is above reproach fatuous; under this logic a beautifully sculpted toilet would be as valuable as the *Pieta* if it were crafted as well. When a good artist fails to live up to his standards it's far more of a waste than when a bad artist does what's expected.

I think McGregor's general remarks on the fan press come from a common artist's fantasy. That is the fantasy that every decent, intelligent person loves their work, and that anyone that doesn't must have some sinister ulterior motive. Well, whatever gets you through the night; certainly it's no fun having your name slagged in the public prints. The ultimate purpose of criticism is to enhance the value and meaning of a given work. The trouble is that not all art is good and even fewer critics are good. I personally haven't done a negative review in over a year, not because comics have gotten better (quite the opposite), but because I thought it was more important to write about what I liked than what I disliked for a while at least. At any rate it should be remembered that the *Comics Journal* exists not because a benign comics industry supports it, but because ten thousand people pony up two dollars a month to buy what it's selling. That it wouldn't exist without comics is hardly germane, firemen wouldn't exist without fires.

In closing, I'm sorry that McGregor's feelings were hurt when he thought I was ragging on his friend. I only hope that McGregor will be a little more thoughtful the next time he tries to impugn a stranger's integrity.

R. Fiore

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me."

—Anonymous.

"White man speak with forked tongue."

—Hundreds of white actors portraying Indians in hundreds of B-Westerns.

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

—From T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*

The temptation to defend oneself when attacked in print (or in any other form for that matter) is innate. I see little point in replying to each allegation in your missive point by point, whether I am paranoid, chickenshit, honest or dishonest, or even whether my major theme is "machismo." If it is, I have the feeling Hemingway is turning over in his grave. However, since I already have offended you by making a few comments on your critical acumen, I shall refrain. A

Con't pg. 78

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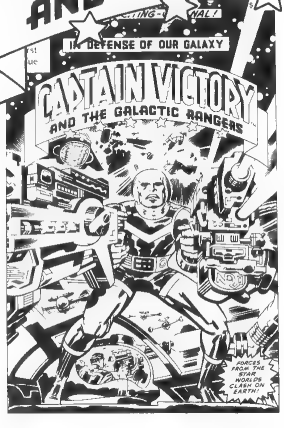

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BOOKS

For the fan of comic
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The Studio (Dragon's
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y of the work of several of
finest artists of the sev-
ties: Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta, Berni Wrightson and Barry Windsor-Smith. Jones and Smith, particularly, have gained much of the acclaim previously given to the now almost dormant Frazetta.

In *The Studio*, we get a glimpse of the potential and talent of these four young artists. Jones is represented by much of his best color work. His study of the differing postures and attitudes of the female form and his graceful, non-Frazetta barbarians are paritcularly striking.

Wrightson is represented by some fine color work and a retrospective of the moody exacting black and white work that is so reminiscent of that fine EC comic artist, Graham Engels.

Kaluta's color work reminds one of two excellent artists, Howard Pyle and Arthur Rackham—a comparison which I'm sure Mike would be pleased to hear. His work has a dreamlike quality that is more in keeping with flights of fantasy and fancy than the hard work of SF.

Finally, a great deal of Barry Windsor-Smith's work (much of it available in poster form from his own Gorblimey Press) is collected in the book.

The Studio is a nice representative look at the work of these four talented men. The color plates are well reproduced and are generally true to the originals. The commentary by the artists which serves as the book's text is bright, informative, and for the most part, quite interesting. If the book has any flaw, it is a lack of a sense of history—there are no representative pieces of the artists' ventures into comic publishing. Surely a look at Smith's *Conan* or Wrightson's *Swamp Thing* would not have been amiss?

Despite this, *The Studio* is one of the best collections of this sort of art in recent years and is hightly recommended to the collector, the enthusiast, and the lover of fine art.

* * *

While speaking of the Studio, one of it's members, Jeff Jones, has another book here this month: *Yesterday's Lily* (Dragon's Dream $8.95). *Yesterday's Lily* is another example the fine work of this young painter. The books starts with a short biography and a relatively long interview and an introduction written by Dean Motter. The interview is quite informative as it reveals the artist's feelings about what he sets as his artistic goals. The introduction is a further insight on the needs and hungers of a truly creative individual.

Inside *Yesterday's Lily* are page after full color page of some of Jeff's best and rarest paperback covers, interspersed with color and black and white roughs, character sketches, and doodles. Included are some pieces that were originally done as limited edition reproductions which remained unpublished in any other form—a goldmine for the completest.

However the book does have some problems—several of the covers seem to have been reproduced from paperback proofs and have therefore been enlarged many times. The reproduction of a few of the poster pieces seems a bit muddy, and the few black and white comic pieces are not fully representational. Still in all, a fine book, certainly the best thus far on the multi-talented Jeff Jones.

* * *

Now, just so you don't think this whole column is a paen of bribed praise to Dragon's Dream—another of their books is *Secret Art, the work of Ian Miller* ($9.95). With the qualification that reactions to art are visceral and highly personal, I found Miller's work not to my liking. His work is strange to the point of near insanity. Deranged faces from fever dreams stare out of his paintings and the world behind them is haunted and disturbing. Perhaps this is praise for this art, I don't know, but despite the fact that this book is beautifully reproduced, it is not one I want in my library. The artwork is too strange. The poems, by Barry King, are tortured caricatures of the work of Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith—give it a look, but it deserves a miss.

* * *

In recent years, illustrated books about mythological creatures like Gnomes and Faeries have been quite the rage, leading to big books sales and Rankin Bass TV Adaptations. *Kingdom of the Dwarves* by Robb Walsh and David Wenzel (Centaur $8.95) is another work in this field.

As an avid player of *Dungeons and Dragons*, and a lifelong Tolkien fan, I must admit to a certain prejudice about this book. The illustrations of the Dwarf Kings in their halls, and the work of

COLUMN

the Dwarf Smiths (particularly their magic swords) are near to my heart, and rather delightful.

The text, concerning the (fictional??) discovery of an ancient dwarf barrow previously untouched in England by a research team is sprightly and rewarding. The history of the Dwarvish kingdom unearthed with the barrow makes interesting reading, and the illustrations are just perfect.

Reproduction is generally fine, and all-in-all, this is a book to be grabbed by anyone interested in dwarves, fine illustrations, *Dungeons and Dragons* or non-human history. Buy it—it'll repay you.

★ ★ ★

DiFate's Catalog of Science Fiction Hardware (Workman Pub. $8.95). Vincent DiFate has long been one of my favorite illustrator's of "hard" science fiction. He can paint hardware with the best of them, and his knowledge of historical and current developments in the accoutrements of space flight is encyclopedia. Additionally, the idea of a catalog of SF hardward is one so simple and so brillant, that the mind boggles when one realizes that no one thought of it before. One would think therefore, that this book would be an unmitigated success.

Wrong.

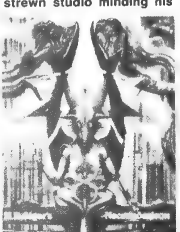
While the book *is* beautifully reproduced, and although DiFate has portrayed some classic SF hardware items, it is not successful. It looks like it was cobbled together from available material with a bit of new text, supplied by Ian Summers. While it is foolish to assume that DiFate would take the time to do a hundred or so illos for this book (it simply would not be lucrative enough to invest that much time), it does not seem too much to ask that there be *some* original material, and that there *not* be endless repetitions of singularly similar spaceships and satellites. Futher, although the book is dedicated to George Pal (a worthy idea), the depictions of the Martian War Machine, Nautilus, and Ornithopter are shockingly uninspired. Also, there is no Time Machine pictured which is surely a major oversight.

DiFate's catalog is a nice book for a browse or a quick look-through, but unfortunately, it is little more than that.

★ ★ ★

A little while ago I talked about the strangeness of *Ian Miller's Secret Art*—now let's look at another *very* strange artist.

Had it not been for a motion picture, *Alien*, H.R. Giger would probably still be quietly working in his bone-strewn studio minding his



own business and continuing to put nightmares on canvas. But after *Alien* happened Giger's art has acquired a marked popularity.

The Necronomicon (Seagate $19.95), Giger's magnum opus, had been around in a special edition for several years. With the advent of *Alien* it was quickly published in paperback form and pushed into a more genral release. It is in *The Necronomicon*, rather than in *Alien* that Giger's visions are fully realized. Giger's work originates from the soul rather than from the mind. There is a strangely compelling madness to Giger's paintings of women who are part glacier, part machine, or part skeleton. It is said that Giger paints his nightmares to exorcise them from his soul. If this is true then that exorcism fills a need in us all.

The Necronomicon is a beautifully printed book with sharp reproductions and beautiful color. Its only drawbacks are that its large size makes it difficult to store on a bookshelf, and its square back binding tends to fall apart if you open the pages too far (or at all). But this is a highly recommended work of the weird and bizarre.

★ ★ ★

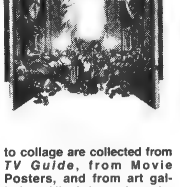
One of the nice things about George Lucas and the success of *Star Wars*, has been the fact that Lucas supervises much of the merchandising that goes out under the *Star Wars* logo.

Up the the present the same has been true of Jim Hensen and his Muppet Empire. However, with the appearance of *The Art of the Muppets* (Bantam $5.95) that concern for the consumer seems to have lessened.

The Art of the Muppets is a beautiful book, with a wealth of data about the birth of the muppets, and pages of fine color photos of the most popular members of the gang (most of these photos were taken at the Muppet exhibit in Lincoln Center in 1978). The problem with this book is its size. For $4.95 (particularly in a book that will be bought mainly by and for children) one expects a certain amount of meat. But *The Art of the Muppets* is very flat and very thin. It's a small book, and it represents a smallness of spirit tht I was unhappily surprised to see from a talant whose work I have admired for many years Shame on you Jim Hensen—what would Kermit think?

★ ★ ★

Fame (Harmony Books $9.95) is subtitled "Portraits of Celebrated People," and that's exactly what it is. From Richard Amsel to Brian Zick, this book chronicles the world of the celebrity. Works ranging from oil to airbrush

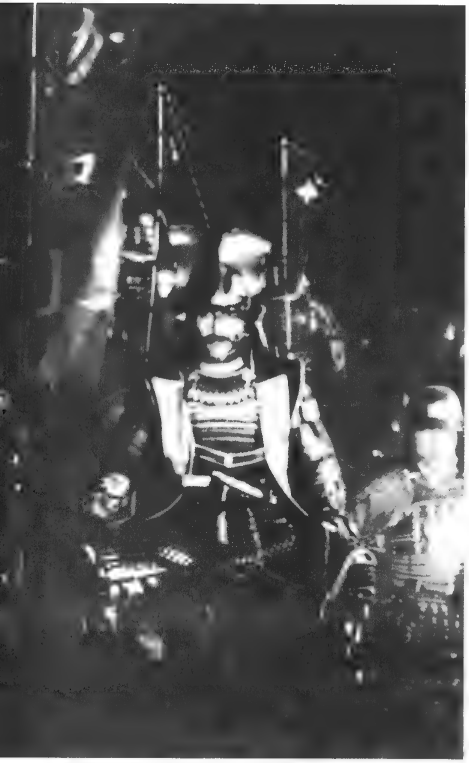


to collage are collected from *TV Guide*, from Movie Posters, and from art galleries. All of them show the faces of fame—from John Wayne to Farrah Fawcett. *Fame* is a kalleidoscope of fame in all it's looks and shapes. If you're a devotee of the famous or if you're a portraiture fan—by all means, buy a copy of *Fame*. ■

by Doug Murray

KAGEMUSHA

A REVIEW BY JOHN WARNER



John Ford made films like this, films that were epic in scope, but small and human in treatment and point of view. Monument Valley and all the big sky Texas could muster couldn't totally swallow up John Ford's people. All the sunsets and towering castles on the road to Kyoto cannot diminish the warriors and fools, the priests and prostitutes, the mothers and daughters, nor even the children in a film by Akira Kurosawa.

The subject of this article is the new Kurosawa film, *Kagemusha*, imported by Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas (you may have heard of them). However, in talking about *Kagemusha*, it is difficult not to touch on a lot of other matters, including other films by Kurosawa, especially *The Seven Samurai*. This won't be a terribly objective piece either — I was hugely impressed by *Kagemusha*. What flaws there may have been were either minor details not to be noticed or too esoteric to the Japanese experience for someone like me, who can't even keep track of the names half the time, to pick up.

It is a spiritual connection, rather than a comparison which brings *The Seven Samurai* to mind when watching this film. *The Seven Samurai* is, without a doubt to my mind, one of the five greatest films ever made and the single greatest example of jidaigeki (period or historical adventure film) in Japan's film history. We're still too close to *Kagemusha* to decide where it fits in. I'm not convinced that history will view it as a better film than *The Seven Samurai*, but it is certainly as fine, and (understandably) a more mature example of filmmaking.

However, as I started to point out, it is the spiritual connection between these two films that is far more significant than their comparison. *The Seven Samurai* is what it is, of a particular time and place in Kurosawas development, as is *Kagemusha*. Yet both are drawn from the same vision.

There is a great pagentry and sense of ritual to this film that is more evocative of *Chushingura* (not a Kurosawa film) than *The Seven Samurai*. But Kurosawa films are not documentaries presenting only simplistic historical veneer. His people have a vitality that connects them to the present and forces one to look beyond a shallow illusion of stratification to see that all these men, shogun or beggar, are of one lot — survivors. One must be a survivor in a Kurosawa film, because life is real, life is hard

as hell.

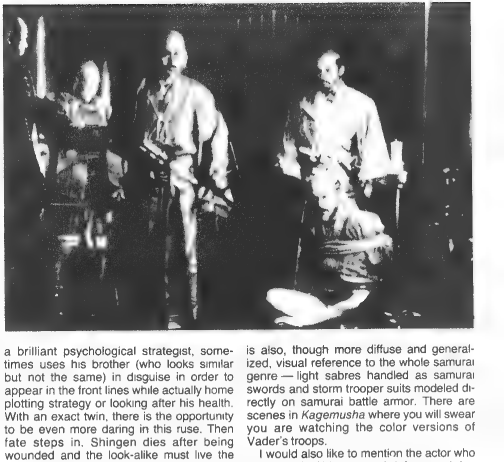
There are two things I would do well to mention at this juncture. In some ways, they form a relationship. One, since this is a samurai film, you may be assuming that you will be seeing a lot of fancy fighting and swordplay. Sorry. In point of fact, no one so much as draws a sword. That doesn't mean that the film is pastoral, but simply that there is a possible (and, I think, worthwhile) distinction to be made between an adventure film and an action film. It is also, in part, because this is a war film. Instead of an individual hero taking on a world of "evil," there is more of a concern with troop movements, strategy and show of force. I might add that there are some really well staged battlefield sequences in this film.

The other point, which is also part of an explanation of the first, is that there are no "good guys" and "bad guys" in this film. There are only, microscopicly, a bunch of different folks, some more inclined to be decent than others. Of the three warlords vying for power and control of Japan in the film, none of them seem very horrible. In fact, one gets a feeling throughout *Kagemusha* that an election would make much more sense than a war (except that the Japanese people were very disorganized at this period of history). The milieu is essentially existential, and there are no quick and easy exits into heroics, although there are scenes of great courage and dignity.

Kagemusha takes place in the late 16th century, a very critical period in Japan's history. Japan, in some ways paralleling Europe of the same period, had been emerging out of a kind of dark ages. Japanese society was undergoing changes, further fueled by the influx of European trade and religion. It was no longer viable for the country to remain a disorganized and purely feudal collection of territories. Someone had to become top dog, centralize the government and create a unified and powerful nation that could cope with the stresses of international relations. People were generally aware that the change had to come, but most of these regional warlords had a different notion of who was best suited to do it.

At the specific time the film takes place, three warlords have emerged as most likely to succeed: Takeda Shingen, Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu. Nobunaga and Ieyasu have formed an uneasy but functional alliance in order to concentrate on destroying Shingen. Both Nobunaga and Ieyasu are young and forceful. Shingen, on the other hand, is an old general, a practitioner of Zen referred to as "the Mountain" because he does not move, but holds his territory as if in meditation, then strikes, cleanly, calculatedly. Shingen is not human, he is mythic, as is the fear which both of the younger warlords feel towards him.

Mythic implies that there is a greater whole than is apparent on the surface. This is one of the central issues in Kurosawa's tale of a man who is Shingen's mirror image (the setup here is a little arbitrary). Shingen,



a brilliant psychological strategist, sometimes uses his brother (who looks similar but not the same) in disguise in order to appear in the front lines while actually home plotting strategy or looking after his health. With an exact twin, there is the opportunity to be even more daring in this ruse. Then fate steps in. Shingen dies after being wounded and the look-alike must live the role lest all that Shingen built is destroyed. It is an ultimately hopeless venture; the clan becomes as an animated corpse. They can go through the motions, but they can't maintain they myth. Without the myth, they are, for all their earnestness and courage, paper tigers.

The other side of the coin is that this myth is also, sometimes surprisingly, sometimes alarmingly, human. He has gambled dearly and made grim mistakes which, with his passing, tear at the very foundation of what he has built.

There's much more to the story than all this, but I'm not going to give you a plot summary here. It seems unnecessary and it's much more rewarding to see the story, with all its fine intricacies and nuances, unfold for yourself. Akira Kurosawa is a master craftsman. We should also be grateful to Donald Ritchie, a critic and film historian who has made a career out of studying Kurosawa's life and work, for providing a fine and sensitive subtitle script.

It is interesting that this film's U.S. distribution, being handled by Twentieth Century Fox, is made possible by (along with Fracis Coppola) George Lucas of *Star Wars*. It is in a sense the discharging of a debt, a debt which I think Lucas would be the first to acknowledge. One expects to find in *Star Wars* roots linking it to Flash Gordon, as well as some of the early classics of science fiction (such as the Heinlien juveniles). Yet, here, one sees a great spiritual link between Lucas' *Star Wars* and the films of Akira Kurosawa, stylistically and themicly. There is also, though more diffuse and generalized, visual reference to the whole samurai genre — light sabres handled as samurai swords and storm trooper suits modeled directly on samurai battle armor. There are scenes in *Kagemusha* where you will swear you are watching the color versions of Vader's troops.

I would also like to mention the actor who plays both Shingen and (of course) his double, Tatsuya Nakadai. He is a magnificent and emotive actor and, although not nearly as well known to american audiences as Toshiro Mifune (even before TV's *Shogun*), has a small but devoted following among those who love the Japanese cinema. He is probably best known for his role as a psychopathic samuria in *Sword of Doom*. In most of the films I have seen him, he is usuglly playing someone greatly torn and tortured from within. Yet each role is very different because of the complexity and subtlety he invests in his performance. That is the craft of the artist.

But, above all else, *Kagemusha* represents a triumphal homecoming — both as being the first new Kurosawa film in six years (and only the second in the past decade) and as Kurosawa's return to the jidaigeki. He has gloriously proved that he is as vital a filmmaker as he ever was, perhaps more so. He is like "the Mountain" — his pace, perhaps, has slowed, but he strikes measuredly, calculatedly, and straight for the heart! In an industry where the old guard quickly fade and are overthrown by the young, it is refreshing, even comforting to acknowledge this. And it is only fitting that he is carried, like the venerated master, on the shoulders of two men who stand between the eras of their own brilliant youth and their present and future matured vision and mastery. Mr. Kurosawa, Mr. Coppola and Mr. Lucas: thank you, one and all! ■

— John Warner

Wrightson·Kaluta·Jones

APPARITIONS
By Berni Wrightson

A guided tour through the macabre mind of Berni Wrightson, featuring full color monsters, aliens, and the like. This is a marvelous collection of paintings by one of the masters of mood and mystery. The regular edition contains 8 11x14 plates, plus an illustrated black and white envelope, all for $8.00.

There is also a limited signed and numbered edition of the portfolio (series 1 to 1,000), which contains an additional black and white 11x14 illustration. This edition sells for $15.00, and is in ever-shortening supply.

CHILDREN OF THE TWILIGHT
By M.W. Kaluta

Four scenes of haunting beauty, featuring strange creatures - half-human and half-beast. Each plate is rendered in lush, rich tones of color, showcasing the tremendous talents of this gifted artist. The regular edition of this portfolio contains the four 11x14 full color plates, and an illustrated black and white presentation envelope. $8.00.

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STARSTRUCK
By M.W. Kaluta

M.W. Kaluta created the costumes and the set designs for this well-conceived and received off-Broadway play. Six of the play's stellar characters are featured in this portfolio, and offer an excellent opportunity to view Kaluta's fine pen and brush style. This black and white portfolio is a limited one (series 1 to 2,000) and is signed and numbered by the artist. The envelope illustration shows all the members of the cast. $15.00.

WORLD WITHOUT END

Jeffrey Jones is an expert in the use of subtle shade and atmosphere and he exhibits that talent with this, his latest portfolio. Four separate scenes of tranquil beauty, as four women represent the four eternal seasons of earth. It is a work of loving care, and the reproduction is precise. The regular edition of this portfolio contains the four 11x14 full color plates, plus an illustrated envelope, all for $10.00.

The limited signed and numbered edition (series 1 to 1,000) contains an additional 11x14 black and white plate. This version is signed and numbered by the artist and is available for $15.00.

THE STUDIO

It was only a matter of time before there would be a book celebrating the collected genius of Barry Windsor-Smith, Jeffrey Jones, M.W. Kaluta, and Berni Wrightson. These four artists together have helped to shape not only the comics industry, but that of the finer arts as well. After two years of research and planning, this book contains the finest examples of what these four men can do. It is a necessary addition to any serious collector's library of fine comic and romantic art. 156pp. full color. $14.95.

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- CHILDREN OF THE TWILIGHT - LIMITED ED.
- STARSTRUCK
- WORLD WITHOUT END
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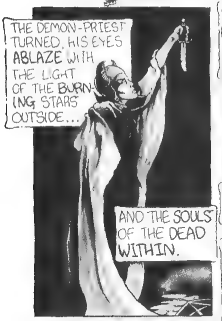
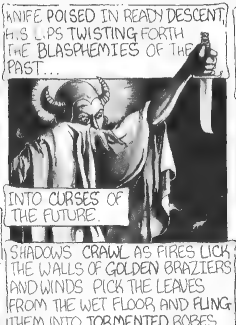
ON THE ROCKS


THE DEMON-PRIEST TURNED, HIS EYES ABLAZE WITH THE LIGHT OF THE BURNING STARS OUTSIDE...
AND THE SOULS OF THE DEAD WITHIN.


KNIFE POISED IN READY DESCENT, HIS LIPS TWISTING FORTH THE BLASPHEMIES OF THE PAST...
INTO CURSES OF THE FUTURE.
SHADOWS CRAWL AS FIRES LICK THE WALLS OF GOLDEN BRAZIERS AND WINDS PICK THE LEAVES FROM THE WET FLOOR, AND FLING THEM INTO TORMENTED ROBES OF AMBER AND VIOLET.

STILL CURSING, THE DEMON-PRIEST KNELT TO THE SLICK STONES AND FROM WITHIN THE PENTAGRAM DREW FORTH THE HEART OF A LAMB.

...ALLOWING THE FRESH CRIMSON TO FLOW FROM HIS HAND...

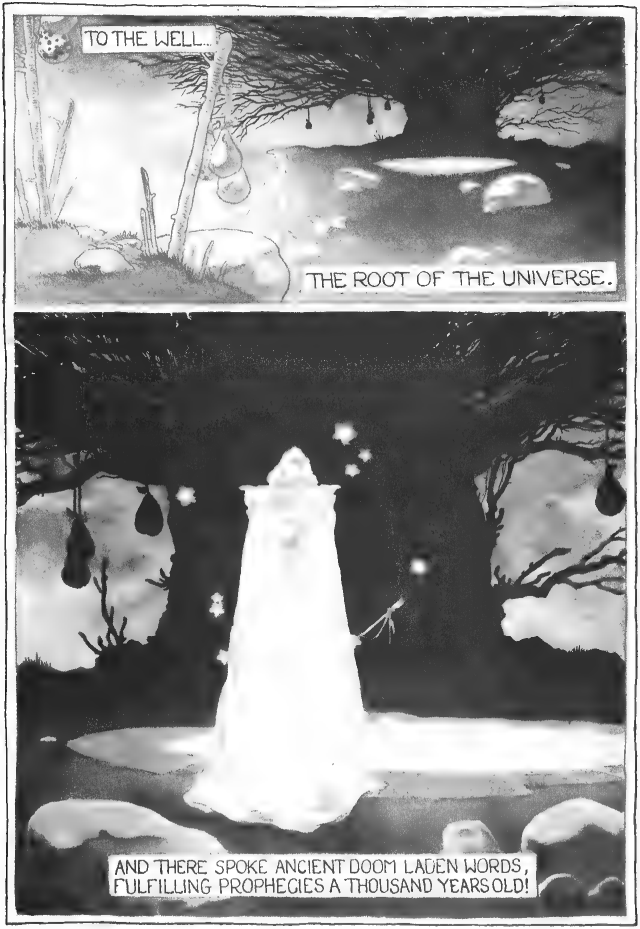
WITH EYES TIGHTLY CLOSED, MOIST AND NOSTRILS FLARED HE FINISHES HIS BASTARD SERMON AND PLUNGES THE KNIFE INTO THE MUSCLE AND TEARS IT OPEN.

...INTO THE CUP BELOW!

STORY BY · GEORGE PRATT IV ·

ART Robert Williams ©1991

IT WAS THE TWILIGHT OF THE SEVENTH DAY AND HE STRODE PURPOSEFULLY THRU THE LAST SHADOWS..
PRIEST


TO THE WELL...
THE ROOT OF THE UNIVERSE.
AND THERE SPOKE ANCIENT DOOM LADEN WORDS, FULFILLING PROPHECIES A THOUSAND YEARS OLD!

"ARISE MASTER OF DEATH AND DARKNESS... ARISE!"
"I AM HERE!"

"THE GATE IS OPEN, THE UNIVERSE IS YOURS!"
"YES."
THE AGE OF THE EVIL ONE HAD COME! THE UNIVERSE DIED SCREAMING, ENGULFED BY ITS BLACK FORM! AND THE DYING STARS ECHOED WITH THE PRIEST'S INSANE LAUGHTER!
-END-

BLOWTORCH
©'81 m gumen
MADAME, ISN'T IN, M'SIEU!
WELL, WHERE IS SHE, BITCH? WHERE, MAAM, WHERE??
OH!
BE COOL, BIG AL! SHE'S ONLY A CHICK!
A CHIQUE? ONLY? AVE YOU EVAIR READ SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR, TU MALE CHAUVINIST PORC?
I DON'T GIVE A %$!#%!! SHE BETTA TELL US... I WANT BOUNCER!!
I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU HAD TO BRING HIM ALONG, YOGUE!
BOUNCER AND HIS NEW WIFE WERE OFF TO THEIR HONEYMOON ISLAND, NOW THAT THEY MADE OFF WITH WEEDE'S MONEY. THEY ALSO PLAN TO RUB ME OUT, BUT THEY AREN'T AWARE OF THE SURPRISE I'VE IN STORE. WILL THEY BE SORRY WHEN THEY FIND-- I GET SEASICK.
MY BUTLER GOES WHERE I GO, OKAY??
HEY! I DON'T GO FOR THAT KINDA MÉNAGE À TROIS!
T-TEE HEE!
AW, BABY... WE'RE STARTING OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT. THIS IS OUR HONEYMOON!
IT'S THE WORST HONEYMOON I'VE HAD SO FAR, AND I'VE HAD QUITE A FEW!
¡SEÑORA, SI TU ME QUIERES, AQUI ESTOY! HEH-HEH!
YA BETTER PUT YOUR EYES BACK IN THOSE SOCKETS, J'HECTOR!
¡LO SIENTO, SEÑOR! ¡PERDON!
KILL HIM! KILL! KILL!
SHUT THAT BRAT OF YOURS UP, SHRIMFY!
A-AW, LET THE K-KID HAVE H-HIS FUN!
WE'RE ALL GONNA BE FEAP ANYWAY, SO WHAT DOES IT MATTER? EVERYTHING'S PLASTIC! ASK THAT MOTHER-F%!!%, BLOWTORCH!
LADY X! WHAT...
I SHOULDN'T BE CUTTING YOU LOOSE, BLOWTORCH... YOU LET WEEDE DIE, BUT I WANT REVENGE AGAINST THOSE HOODS ON DECK.
I HAVE A QUICK QUESTION.
HOW DID I GET HERE?
NO—WHERE DO I SEND MY BILL?
HEY! WHERE DID YOU GO?
YOO-HOO! BLOWTORCHY...
WE'VE STOPPED N-NOT FAR FROM SHORE, 'C-CAUSE YOU HAVE A P-PATE WITH P-PAVY JONES' L-LOCKER!
SHUDDUP!
A PATE? REMEMBER, I ONLY GO OUT *DUTCH*!
O.K.!
Murad

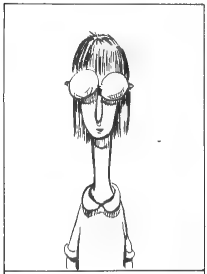
THE SHALOMO SHOW

By JAMES P. STROUD

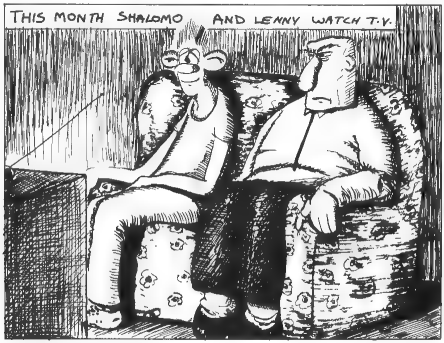
SHALOMO'S FRIEND
"LENNY"

LENNY'S DOG
"TIGER"

SHALOMO'S LANDLORD
"SHORTY THE PIRATE"



SHORTY'S WIFE
"LANACANE"



CINEMATIC SYMBOLISM

The Art Of

* P. *

☆CRAIG☆

☆RUSSELL☆

By Robert S. Schaffer

Frantisek Kupka, *The Conqueror Worm* This drawing, adapted by Russell for *The Chimera* portfolio, illustrates the Symbolist fondness for taking titles (and ideas) from literary works. In this case, a poem by Poe about death The peacock feathers in the wings are dear to the Symbolists, as is their habit of using images of women in ambiguous ways, especially as symbols of death or evil

Craig Russell has established himself as the artist of the lyrical in the comics field. In Russell's universe, all form seeks organic representation; even machines pulse with the rhythms of nature—the art curves, entangles, surrounds, like vines grown mad. The characters within this universe (almost always on quests) seek to harmonize with it, or to restore it to a harmonious condition. For example, Killraven, Parsifal and The Avatar, all deal with a landscape riddled with evil or obstructions that must either be dealt with or removed before harmony can be achieved. In this sense, the narratives of Russell's mature work are deceptively simple Stated baldly, they involve a character entering a particular landscape, confronting it, and after a conflict, understanding it. In *The Chimera* portfolio, we will deal with what happens to a character who does not understand; with *Elric*, we will deal with a character who can manipulate the landscape to his advantage, but is denied understanding all the same.

But the psychological tensions created by Russell go beyond the narrative to move into a realm of self-reflection and intellectual resonance where the characters seek knowledge of themselves while in conflict. In the *Doctor Strange Annual* (co-plotted with Marv Wolfman), Dr. Strange seeks to destroy an evil foe (Lectra of Phaseworld), but the story soon moves beyond this crude plot into a realm where he must seek to confront his own limitations and understand his foe as well The end of the story leads us to believe that the Dr. Strange who leaves Phaseworld will be a different, wiser individual than the one who entered it.

Character transformation is much more apparent in what is still one of the best comic books around: *War of the Worlds/Killraven*. The collaboration between Don McGregor and Craig Russell was that chance happening, so rare in comics of artist and writer intersecting to produce a thematically consistent, intelligent book still worth studying. Even though not written by Russell, the strip exhibits themes that will engage him in his later work—especially in the movement of character toward greater comprehension. In *War of the Worlds*, Killraven starts off as a character whose motives are a desire for freedom and sparked by anger against the Martians, revenge. It is his interaction with the distorted landscape (which was in the process of being destroyed by man long before the Martians arrived, as McGregor would so often point out), his own Freeman (especially Carmilla Frost), and those he encounters, that change his attitudes to those of compassion and understanding. He does not abandon his original purpose (to free Earth of the Martians), but his motives slowly change Schematically, Killraven was a "masculine" force—violent, swift—but somewhat unfocused, hard, and unsubtle. Carmilla Frost brought the "feminine—although always shown as a good fighter, she introduced the ideas of warmth and compassion, of fighting not just the Martians, but of fighting to become human again, as well (I use the terms "masculine" and "feminine" here tentatively, and do not mean them literally but as a metaphor for the energies McGregor and Russell tried to portray) It is the mixture of all these qualities, the joining together of opposites to form wholeness, that is posited as humanity in this series. As *War of the Worlds* progressed, it tried to begin dealing with the issue of what kind of society *should* emerge from victory, rather than the mere destruction of

Fernand Khnopf, *Brown Eyes and a Blue Flower* The most elegant stylist of the Symbolist school, this artist was obsessed by the image of his dead sister, whom he portrayed in work after work (Note the circle enclosing the drawing, which is a visual motif closely related to Art Nouveau)

the one the Martians built. Unfortunately, the strip was cancelled before all of these ideas could be dealt with properly.

Essentially, Russell's narratives take this pattern—naivete, knowledge, and then hopefully, understanding. However, it is worth investigating two narratives that do not follow this pattern—*The Chimera portfolio, which Russell thinks of as a 'graphic story in portfolio form'' and Elric*

In *The Chimera*, the hero is a handsome figure, yet his actions are purely barbaric and violent. A tension is set up between our expectations of a "hero" and what that character is actually doing in terms of the narrative—the hero's looks are thereby undercut. Captured, he confronts the Chimera who horrifies him (A chimera, though it has a specific form in greek mythology, is here used in its general definition as "any fabulous or impossible fancy"). My reading of this is that he is at once horrified by his own bloody actions as he is by the fantastic image of the Chimera itself, for the Chimera has allowed him a look into his soul. Terrified, the hero is swallowed up by several monstrous beings, and it is here that the strip ends. Russell indicates in his notes that this is only the first chapter to an uncompleted second and third, which would be called "A Journey" and "Transfiguration." Clearly, the hero "dies" because he is unable to understand his violence, or comprehend the image of the Chimera. Of course, laying out the narrative in such blatant terms can only sound somewhat silly; after all, it is the art that gives these ideas life. However, one other narrative begs our attention, and that is the *Elric* strip

Elric's universe, as laid out by Michael Moorcock, is far removed from the ideas that Russell is drawn to. Moorcock writes of a world where chance, chaos, and dark gods hold sway. Elric himself is a mixed bag as a hero, for his own actions tend to bring destruction down on the heads of those he helps as much as on the heads of his enemies. With his source of power a demonic sword called Stormbringer that sucks the souls of his victims, he cuts a curious figure. Russell, on the other hand, is drawn to the heroic and the noble—his universe embodies harmony and understanding. The result of Moorcock's philosophy and Russell's art is an intensely drawn, highly dramatic comic that pushes Russell's art into a morbid and dark realm, and yet remains thematically connected to Russell's other works. In a way, *Elric* allows Russell to express the darker side of his art. Unlike the main character in *The Chimera*, who, it can be imagined, stands a chance of being reborn as a wiser being, Elric must continue as he is, seeking comprehension but being constantly denied it by a perverse fate. Elric, as a magician, can manipulate his landscape, but he can never fully understand it, or control his own fate within it. The tension between the ideas of Russell and Moorcock is very similar to the tensions in *Elric* itself: Order vs. Chaos, understanding vs. incomprehension, light vs. dark. As such, the resultant epic conflict creates imagry that is fantastic.

It's now time to roll up our sleeves and delve into the art itself, and to do this, we must backtrack and offer a little art history lecture on Symbolism—the French art movement that had languished in relative obscurity until quite recently. Those familiar with Barry Winsor Smith and the Studio have no doubt heard some mention of

William Holman Hunt, *The Lady of Shalott* This highly detailed drawing, also the subject of a painting by the artist, is an illustration of a Tennyson poem. A fine example of the Pre-Raphaelite style, it illustrates this British movement's concerns for fabric, detail and static figure representation

Gustave Moureau, *The Chimeras* (detail). The works of this artist helped crystallize the concerns of Symbolism, though he remained isolated and aloof from much of the movement. Notable here is the fantastic architecture that owes much to the Gothic style and which is an influence on Russell as well

of Symbolism, and especially the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Yet few comic art fans seem to know what these movements are, or what their significance is to the many comic artists who draw inspiration from them. I offer my own modest attempt to begin to rectify this situation.

Briefly, Symbolism was an art movement that attempted to move beyond the realm of material things and portray the fantastic, the unimaginable, and the eerie. Essentially a French movement, it also had a special impact on Belgian and German artists. A late nineteenth-century movement, it reacted against Impressionism and the Academic tradition (although it often employed their techniques) to produce a curious body of art: many canvasses do evoke the intended effect of the fantastic or the sublime. Unfortunately too many others amuse or startle us because of the artist's failure to communicate his vision on canvas. Art historians are hard put to define or reduce the movement, because so many artists gathered under its banner. However, if Symbolism is not stylistically consistent, it is consistent in its attempt to create a mood and an atmosphere where familiar things seem mysterious. The Symbolists were not concerned with a literal portrayal of the image, their goal was to find the meaning behind the image, or what the image could "symbolize."

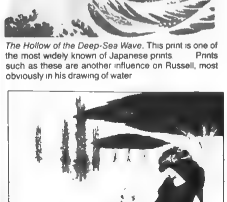
In this sense, much of Symbolism was very literary, and many of the canvasses sought to portray scenes from the works of the writers and poets of the day, such a Flaubert, Baudelaire, or Rimbaud. Another influence on Symbolism was Edgar Allan Poe, whom the French eagerly embraced, relishing his morbidity, his melancholy, and his belief that art should be judged on aesthetic principles, rather than moral ones. In England, where many of the seeds that formed Symbolism were first sown, artists were pursuing similar goals, but with much less of the excess found in France (the English are not drawn to the morbid or extravagant in their aesthetics). However, the Pre-Raphaelite movement, which predates Symbolism somewhat, sought many similar ends: artists like Burne-Jones or Rosetti also wanted to capture nostalgic moments and disturbing moods, and the morbidity of the French often finds its way into the work of a later artist like Aubrey Beardsley, although in a much more playful manner.

This little synopsis is by necessity short and simple—to go into detail would take a *lot* of space and the reason why Symbolism fell into obscurity would require yet another long explanation of how aesthetic taste shifts. The important thing is that the rediscovery of Symbolism afforded comic artists a whole new catalogue of imagery and opened a new doorway in regard to the comic narrative.

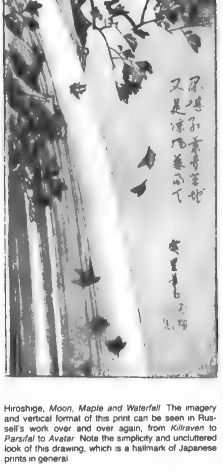
There are several good books on the movement, and those interested should pick up Philippe Jullian's *Dreamers of Decadence* or *The Symbolists*. A personal favorite of mine is a small paperback by Alastair Mackintosh called *Symbolism and Art Nouveau*, which offers a concise history and explanation of these movements.

Another level of Russell's art that we should touch on is the musical influence. Russell mentions Anton Bruckner and Richard Wagner as influences on the Chimera, and many of his comics will flow and ebb with the rhythms of Late Romantic music. It's hard to pin-point musical inspiration (You can't really point and say, "Panel six, see, is really four chords from Mahler's First Symphony"), but the lushness and heroic tendencies of his comics are closely linked to the composers of the late nineteenth-century. I strongly suggest people read a Russell comic, like *Avatar and the Chimera* or Parsifal, while playing music by a composer like Bruckner and Mahler. Whether you like the music or not, it will clarify many of Russell's preoccupations. Personally, I have a mixed response

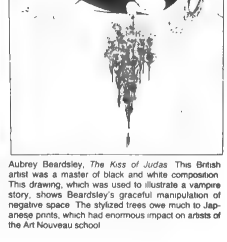
Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *The Palace of Art*. Another illustration for a Tennyson poem by the leading founder of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, this drawing shows Rossetti's fondness for hair and spiritual subject matter (Rossetti was especially fond of red hair, and was known to chase after subjects if he happened to glimpse a good set of locks)



The Hollow of the Deep-Sea Wave. This print is one of the most widely known of Japanese prints. Prints such as these are another influence on Russell, most obviously in his drawing of water



Hiroshige, *Moon, Maple and Waterfall*. The imagery and vertical format of this print can be seen in Russell's work over and over again, from *Killraven* to *Parsifal to Avatar*. Note the simplicity and uncluttered look of this drawing, which is a hallmark of Japanese prints in general



Aubrey Beardsley, *The Kiss of Judas*. This British artist was a master of black and white composition. This drawing, which was used to illustrate a vampire story, shows Beardsley's graceful manipulation of negative space. The stylized trees owe much to Japanese prints, which had enormous impact on artists of the Art Nouveau school

to the Romantics, but I am moved by them all the same, often because of their outrageous musical conceits and lushness of sound. Bruckner, especially when played under headphones, can swamp you into an aural realm that seems like drowning, but I have a mixed response to music that conspires to sweep you away with such pure emotion. However, one *should* experience this type of music. Too many of us were frightened off "serious" music by ghouls disguised as music teachers in the early years of our education, and people have broken into a cold sweat over Beethoven ever since. So do youself a favor—turn off that AM radio and try a Romantic instead (Those with the ears for it may try Schoenberg and 12-tone scale, if you dare!).

Russell, by the way, breaks his mature art into "Opuses." An 'opus' means a musical work or composition and Russell fully intends the musical allusion as many of his comics are musically inspired. Coincidentally, many Symbolists wished to do with paint what a composer could do with music.

Although Opus One is *The Chimera* and I will not make much reference to Russell's early work, I would like to look at an early *Dr. Strange* (*Marvel Premiere 7*) as it affords a comparison between the early and the mature Russell.

What strikes one are the similarities, rather than the differences. Even in this early work the sense of narrative is highly developed, even if the drawing style is still emerging. In evidence is Russell's tendency to let facial expressions carry the story, as is his habit of laying out panels in a very direct, concise manner. Russell has never been one for gussied-up narrative tricks, such as breaking panels into weird shapes or forms. His comics are always rooted in very straightforward breakdowns, and I suspect it is this solid narrative sense that allows him freedom to elaborate and experiment. For no matter how fantastic the imagery, the forms and structure of the comic contain it and discipline it.

Additionally, this Dr. Strange story has a full page panel that, among other things, shows us the transformation of a demon-God's face into an abstract crystalline form, such abstractions will appear in Russell's work again, noticeably in *Killraven* and *Elric*. The main thing is how Russell's narrative style was established so early, and how it gets even simpler as he progresses, while his line gets more and more complex. Later, his narrative is often so clear that the word balloons become extraneous.

And this brings us to the *Chimera*, a sourcebook of Symbolist imagery which also illustrates Russell's facility for wordless narrative.

The Chimera is composed of ten plates, drawn in pencil, in a highly controlled line that is incredibly tight for all its fluidity. The pencils seem to allow Russell a greater facility for shading and subtle line effects.

This full page panel from *Doctor Strange* (*Marvel Premier 7*) is an example of early Russell. The simple architecture foreshadows Russell's later elaborate forms, and the transformation of the demon-god's face into an abstract pattern will occur again in *Elric*. And even here, in the three insets of the woman's eyes, we see Russell using an economy of means to express growing horror by the alteration of a few lines.

Alphonse Mucha, *Monaco "Monte Carlo"*. For many, this Czech-born French artist is Art Nouveau, and his posters are still popular today. In his own day, this artist spawned scores of imitators, but none could capture the zest in his drawings, the brilliant rendering of standard Mucha motifs as elaborate floral patterns, stars, and the hairlock on a life of its own as it snaked its way through his drawings. (If you're familiar with Art Nouveau at all, it's more than likely due to the subtle colours of Mucha, and the bold stark brilliance of Beardsley.)

This marvelfously malevolent creature (the chimera of *The Chimera*) should be compared to Kupka's *Conqueror Worm*, which inspired it. Of course, Russell has altered Kupka to suit his own needs, and the whole image has a fluid quality not noticable in the original. Where Kupka's drawing seems to move stiffly on a stage, Russell's seems to swirl up into the panel. I'm especially fond of the hair, which twists and turns to its own logic.

The eyes of fate. Disturbingly cat-like, the chimera's stare (top) confronts the viewer, and in these six panels (bottom) they confront the "hero" who is none too happy about being the object of their gaze.

The toned greyness of the pencils creates a mood that remains even if the narrative is forgotten. For example, the Chimera of the title, a stunning, startling creature, creates a disturbing aura that extends beyond the story and it is this presence of a sub-text beyond the narrative that distinguish many of Russell's comics. The image of the Chimera by the way, was inspired by a drawing called "The Conqueror Worm" by Frantisek Kupka, a symbolist artist who used a Poe title in this drawing.

Although *The Chimera* lacks many of the tensions that will appear in later work, the Russell style is readily apparent. In the story are such standard devices as circular forms that elaborate within themselves, long flowing lines that are often hair (or vegetation), water and architecture. The architecture in *The Chimera* shows us a fascination with the form that male anatomy may take when drawn as an ideal, although I have pointed out how the noble rendering here is undercut by the narrative. Still, the Grecian anatomy that suggests Renaissance art (there is a direct pictorial reference to a statue by Michelangelo) will be echoed in almost all of Russell's work. His view of life is an essentially positive one where understanding and comprehension are possible. Part of the way that this philosophy is expressed is in the idealization of the human form. (Not that all of Russell's characters look like gods and goddesses—far from it—but that it is just another element in the expression of Russell's ideas).

I mentioned the reliance of facial gestures earlier, and *The Chimera* has a wonderful array of expressions. The malevolence communicated by the Chimera's eyes retain themselves in your imagination, and a memorable exchange takes place when the "hero" and the Chimera confront each other. By using only the barest suggestion of line, Russell changes the expression of each to represent interest, fear, and finally control (on the Chimera's part), and shock (on the hero's part). This concern for giving characters a wide variety of facial expressions is a refreshing breath of air from the usual gritted teeth, staunch stances, and tight lips of all too much comic art. This concern has become central in Russell's art as the desire to portray internal states has taken hold, and with *The Chimera*, we can see that concern begin to take shape.

A less noticable influence on *The Chimera*, is—Dr. Seus! Go ahead, laugh. But I see the Grinch in those skeletal warriors the hero does battle with, even if

Russell's shapes are more satanic. And the loony vegetation that Russell loves to draw seems to owe much to Seuss' crazy trees, and if you don't believe me, dig up your copies of *Green Eggs and Ham* or *If I Ran the Circus*.

Russell also likes to pack his panels with clues and symbols that reflect the narrative or clarify some of its themes. Even if the reader is not consciously aware of these touches, they affect him anyway, as when a film director fills a room with objects for a particular scene. We may not observe all of the things in the scene, but they influence our reaction all the same.

A fine example of this occurs in two panels on the last page of *The Chimera*. In one panel the main character is being dragged into the organic monstrosities conjured by the Chimera. She watches his plight in as everything around her appears to fall towards her form. Stars dripping tears (another Russell motif) seem to float downwards, and a circular halo (which recalls the elaborate forms of art nouveau artist Alphonse Mucha) surrounds the Chimera and also seems to be curving back into her.

The curved stomach of the Chimera and the spermatozoic forms that appear here and there suggest birth, but it is a "reverse birth" (as Russell has characterized this scene).

The inclusion of a cushion in the lower left corner also echoes this atmosphere. The buttons on the fabric seem to fall inwards in little implosions of their own. On one level, this cushion is innocent—we've probably all seen chairs where the fabric has buttons attached to it, and Russell does nothing to make this cushion look any more ominous than the ones in real life. But it is the atmosphere that imbues all the objects in the scene with an evil resonance.

This panel reinforces the action of the narrative even if we don't notice how it does it. And, as related to the narrative as this panel is, it *could* be removed from the action and studied as a separate drawing. As I will continually argue about Russell, his art has maintained the traditional form of comic narrative, derived from cinema and theatre, of one panel moving to the next, while at the *same* time developing an elaborate drawing style for the actual panels that is at once dependent on, and separate from, the narrative.

Of course, this trend to expand narrative by reinforcing symbolic meaning can be observed in many other comic artists, but comic readers probably became aware of it with Barry Windsor-Smith's *Conan*. This is not the time to go into the intricacies of Smith's style, but the image of Conan offers us a good chance to talk briefly about it. Smith's Conan is not at all like Howard's description, yet it is his stylization that seized people's imaginations. Why? Simple. Smith chose to personify Conan rather than merely illustrate him. Instead of a hulking figure bulging with muscles, Smith drew a Conan who often bore a greater resemblance to a character out of Dante G. Rossetti or art nouveau than out of the blood and guts pulps of the 30's. Yet, Smith managed to get at the core of Conan by symbolizing the energy of the character, rather than slavishly reproducing an author's description, a distinction lost by those who have tried to follow in Smith's footsteps (Alright, so some of you probably prefer Buscema—Some people will eat Cool-Whip, but I make no judgement about that, either)

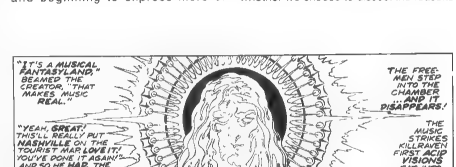
I DID NOT FAINT, MAMA. I "DIED" BACK THERE AND IN IT THAT DEATH I WAS REBORN!
WHY IS IT THAT DAMNABLE CARMILLA FROST'S WORDS STALK ME SO? HER AND HER TALK OF BECKONING STARS AND COSMIC WONDER!
DON'T YOU SEE? ALL THIS TIME, IT WAS THE HARTLANDS TELEPATHIC ABILITIES THAT GAVE ME INVISION...BECAUSE THEIR MENTAL EMANATIONS WERE STRONGER.
THAT OLD BUZZARD, KEEPER WHITMAN... SOMEHOW HE GAVE ME THAT POWER... A POWER I'M ...S" BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND.
KILLRAVEN, EVE IS ALONE! I CAN'T LET HER FACE THOSE BASTS ALONE.
SHE QUIETED ME IN THE NIGHT. SHE WOULD NOT LET ME SUCCUMB TO DESPAIR. SHE BRUSHED THE MUD FROM MY HAIR.

The tense face of Killraven (from Issue 28) considers a few of Don McGregor's word balloons while Old Skull looks on. This drawing is notable for the moody intensity of the linework, which is one of Russell's trademarks.

Although *Killraven* is listed as Opus Two, Opus Three begs our attention first. For the *Dr. Strange Annual* is very related to *The Chimera*, as both bring Russell's Symbolist influence into the open. Conceived at a similar time (a discarded panel from *Strange* appears in *Chimera*, and the skeletal warriors in *Chimera* make a brief appearance in *Strange*), both plots involve the intrusion of a character into an alien world, being subsumed by that world, and, in Strange's case, emerging from that world, hopefully more aware than when he entered it.

The art is curved and seductive. The drawing is relaxed and assured, especially in regard to the anatomy, which is graceful and beginning to express more of Russell's style while shedding its early influences (Russell has talked of Buscema, of all people, as being an early anatomical influence!). As if in resonance with the art, the narrative is itself concerned with a world that is fluid, changeable, flowing. Landscapes twist and turn and seem to float in space. In one memorable panel, the landscape seems to explode into Strange's head, as it simultaneously seems to emerge from it, as well.

Russell's grasp of the visual gambits open to the comic artist is in full display here, especially in the sequence when Strange is being tossed about by Lectra. A panel by panel narrative is abandoned to show Strange falling in space while two inset panels show us, on the top, Strange screaming in agony, and, on the bottom, Lectra gloating. The upper half of the next page foregoes panels as Strange is shown in three interbwining tableaux recovering himself, and then taking the offensive. As his power is gathered, the traditional panels begin to re-emerge, a formal indication that some sort of sanity is being restored, at least for the nonce. The interpretation I place on the lack of panels may not directly occur to us, but the impact of such manipulation does affect us, whether we choose to dissect the reasons


"IT'S A MUSICAL FANTASYLAND," BEHIND THE CREATOR. "THAT MAKES MUSIC REAL."
"YEAH, GREAT! THIS'LL REALLY PUT NASHVILLE ON THE TOURIST MAP. LOVE IT! YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN!" AND SO HE HAD. THE BOARD MEMBERS ALSO WHISPERED, "WHAT'D HE SAY?"
THE FREE-MEDIUM STEP INTO THE CHAMBER ... AND IT DISAPPEARS!
THE MUSIC STRIKES KILLRAVEN FIRST ACID VISIONS EAT INTO THE MIND!

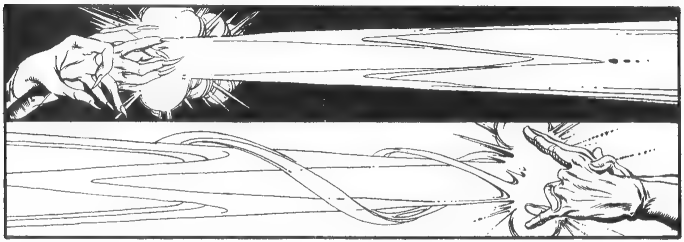
This Killraven (from Issue 32) is an early example of the Art Nouveau influence on Russell, as well as psychedelic art. The halo forms that encircle Killraven's head are vey Mucharish, and the stylization of Killraven's face is very 60ish

or not. Again, the panel structure is potent because it is linked to the narrative. When panels dissolve in Russell, there is always a reason—it is never merely an attempt to flamboyantly show off the artist's skill.

Russell also returns the sense of magic that *Dr Strange* had been lacking for some time. The landscape that twists and turns in space, the energy bolts that swirl and curve through the air like a water, translucent substance, all contribute to the realization of sorcery in visual terms. Consider those energy bolts tossed off by Lectra and Strange—how many artists would have taken the time to draw these bolts intricately, instead of just tossing them off as if they were only laser beams? Russell manages to impart a sense that the particular forms and shapes that emerge from each are related to the personality of each mystic. And the hands from which these bolts emanate, interlock, intertwine, fold over in impossible gestures, and do everything but dance

Two panels illustrate this attention to hands and to individual personality. Before Lectra and Strange do battle, we are shown closeups of them preparing themselves. Not only are their facial expressions different, but the positioning of their hands communicate the differences between them as well. Strange's hands seem to gather into a monolithic form, suggestive of a pyramid. This position suggests a focusing of energies, of forces being compressed into a logical order. Lectra, on the other hand, seems to be vibrating, as if in tune with the forces around her (which she is, since it is her planet that they fight on), and her hands intertwine into a form that suggests some wierd eastern temple. Where Strange seems to be drawing in, Lectra seems to flow out, to "relax" into power. Needless to say, she appears more exotic than Strange.

I mentioned that the story concerns a world ever-changing and shifting. Even the way Lectra's costume is drawn seems to reflect this—it too seems to twist with tension, as if it is a second skin to Lectra. There is movement and flux everywhere and this is very apparent in Russell's rendering of the water Strange and Lectra sail in to reach Allandra, the city that will emerge from the depths. It is extremely difficult to draw water properly, to capture the movement and energy in line. Yet Russell succeeds almost every time. He has hit on a stylization, that although relat-



Lectra and Dr Strange (from the *Dr. Strange Annual*) prepare themselves for battle (two top panels) and then launch their magicks at each other (bottom) Not how each employs distinctly different attitudes and gestures as they ready themselves. This is most easily seen in the exotic form of Lectra's hands and the more familiar pyramid form of Dr Strange's

ed to the abstractions of Japanese prints. is his alone The way his water bubbles and surges and rolls is simply marvellous One of my favorite panels shows the boat Windchime raised aloft by a huge wave. The sense of arrested movement, of water made static, is balanced against the fluidity of line that has captured that movement. One easily imagines the wave crashing down, even though it seems it could remain in its present position forever, as well

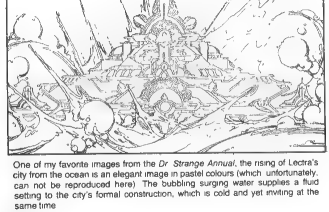
Another memorable sequence is the rising of Allandra from the sea The water surges up in huge bubbles and exploding shapes as the pastel-colored city emerges, and presents architecture for our viewing. The architecture here is more involved and intricte than that in Chimera; the forms suggest a melting of art nouveau into art deco on the planet Mongo Yet, one can always envision these structures being built, no matter how crazy the patterning or maddening the curves.

When the action finally moves to the bottom, going behind the red cloak of Tempus, and finally reappears on the bottom around the swan, as it is changing. This pattern serves to reinforce the link between Strange,Phaydra, and Tempus, while Lectra, who appears in the middle of this page, is isolated from this circle. This is stressed again in a smaller panel, where only part of Tempus is visible behind a word balloon, and his red cloak is linked to the red of Strange's outfit. Behind Strange, the lavender form of Phaydra is seen. Lectra (who is clad in black) is pictured between Tempus and Strange. As the only form not in colour, she is visually isolated from the others. Behind her, also in black, looms the mirror.

As the end draws near, Russell does not draw all the characters in one panel again (except when the soul-mirror explodes/implodes). Lectra goes to her doom alone, Tempus and Phaydra go to their fates together, and Strange is always in his own panels, powerless to prevent the collapse of Phaseworld, though he but the monsters Russell can conjure up do invite some comments. Although Russell's forms are lyrical, and his intended aesthetic effect is to produce beauty, his art is quite capable of twisting that beauty to render its opposite. But the ugliness is still drawn with the same attention to beauty, and it is this ugliness rendered beautifully that produces such compelling horrors. For though the monsters have a seductive quality, they are still monsters (this effect is even more apparent in the textless *La Sonnambula*)

As for implosions, they appear again and again, from the destruction of Deathbirth in *Killraven* to the destruction of Klingsor's castle in *Parsifal* These implosions may be seen as a symbol of Russell's art in general. Since his stories are concerned with the mental states and internal discussions of the characters, and the style of his art consists of a highly-controlled, yet fluid line, a logical symbol is an implosion, where energy is unleashed inwardly rather than outwardly

A big wave, from *Dr Strange*. Compare this drawing to Hokusai's, which is its obvious model, except that Russell has made his more angular and sleeker



One of my favorite images from the *Dr Strange Annual*, the rising of Lectra's city from the ocean is an elegant image in pastel colours (which unfortunately can not be reproduced here). The bubbling surging water supplies a fluid setting to the city's formal construction, which is cold and yet inviting at the same time

Lectra's palace, the patterning escalates. In one panel, Lectra reclines while Strange stands to her right. The soul-mirror stands between them, but closer to Lectra, while around Strange sprout bird-like forms that seem to spiral up towards him Again, a key asspect of the story is illustrated before we are aware of it, for a swan will determine the story's outcome with the mirror In another panel, Strange (in three-quarter profile) watches the silhouettes of Lectra and Phaydra while beyond them, the mirror glints. One could go on and on with these details! Consider the page when the swan finally transforms itself into Tempus, a figure out of Pre-Raphaelite imagery, with his swirling red cloak and detailed wings.

The intertwining of patterns here is extremely effective. For example, a checkerboard curve, begins on the top, behind Strange's elbow. It reappears (blue and black instead of black and white) from behind Phaydra's cape, and curves off the page. It curves back into the page towards

tries.

With *War of the Worlds* henceforth referred to as *Killraven*), one can observe the movement of Russell's cinematic narrative as it slowly absorbs more and more Symbolist influence until in the last issue of the series, the art evolves into a completely new style. Unfortunately, Russell was not in complete control of the art and *Killraven* suffers for it. It's easy to see how artists become disenchanted with the system of having someone ink their pencils, and then having someone else colour the result. Despite this, Russell's style tends to show through even the shoddiest inking job, and he did manage to ink and colour some of the issues

Russell's thematic concerns that would be more fully explored later are evident—the fascination with stars (the title page), the ability to render monstrous organic forms compellingly (page three), and a fascination with implosions, with energy centering into an object (page seven). The image of stars is rather self-explanatory,

This brings us to the junction of artist and writer, for if Russell enjoys portraying tensions, McGregor likes to write about them. Both were well-served by the collaboration Consider the strange group of people McGregor assembled, and how easily Russell rendered them—Atalon in the Deathbreeders episode, whose face is a crazy-quilt of all the monocled Nazis on late night TV, or the cyborg Skar, whose ferocious gestures and brutal features (no nose, gaping hole for eyes, and sadistic mouth) still suggest (unfortunately) human behavior I also get a kick out of the parody of an "art for art's sake" type in the Sacrificer, Atalon's compatriot, even if the means used are a bit extreme—The Sacrificer's "art" consists of carving human babies for the Martians to eat

Although the Symbolist tendencies are only just emerging, Russell's cinematic structure is in full swing—especially in the "Death in the Family" issue, where the use of cross-cutting and montage is pushed to the limits. For an example,

This panel from *Avatar and the Chimera* is a familiar Russell device (similar panels appear in *Killraven* and *Parsifal*). The vertical construction is directly modeled on Japanese motifs. For example, compare this drawing to the Japanese print by Hiroshige reproduced earlier. The layering of the background so that each print appears cut-out and placed on top of each other is a way of organizing space bequeathed by the Japanese. Besides this, the drawing of a male harmonizing with nature is a favorite image in Russell's work.

when Old Skull is wounded by Skar, the preceeding page uses a pastoral setting, in which Old Skull plays a set of pan pipes, used in greek mythology by centaurs in sylvan glades. The intrusion of Skar and his tripod into this scene shows another McGregor/Russell concern: the tension between nature and machine, between what earth's landscape was and what it is now. The transition from nature, Old Skull, Grok, and Hawk to Skar inside his tripod nicely sets up what each side represents.

The intercutting later of Skar stalking Hawk while Killraven stalks Skar who then stalks M'Shulla is tightly compressed on one page into 12 textless panels. The preceeding two pages employed horizontal panels to increase tension by slicing the action into isolated events, thus slowing the pace and stretching out the drama. After the 12 panel compression, two pages of horizontal panels are again used, which by cutting the figures off from one another, increased the sense of dread that hangs over the whole story. Aside from the title page which informs us that two Freemen will die, the authors further disorient us by intercutting between two isolated scenes which feature the Freemen at play. In this way each group is separated and so can not act when danger threatens. (Russell gives us a clue as to who will die in the title page—all of the faces of the Freemen are drawn full-face, except for two, shown in profile).

The death of Hawk and Grok under the avalanche is very tight. Instead of overplaying this moment, it is shown on one page in ten terse wordless panels, and the effect is quietly, chilling accomplished.

Before we talk about the last issue, a silly comment about Issue 35-Is the monster G'Rath a weird sort of giraffe? Just something that's bothered me. Now, on to better things.

Although not planned as the final issues (As with all comics that try for maturity and sophistication, this one was cancelled way before its time), "The Morning After Mourning Prey" is a complete shift from the rest of the series. The art is looser and more experimental as Russell goes deeper and deeper into his new direction. This direction is apparent in the foilage, which surrounds and dominates the mood of the story and in the pages where we see the origin of the butterfly woman, Mourning Prey. First we see it weaving its cocoon, and then, a few pages later, emerging from it to fly off. Of course, the lines swirl and curve, but an interesting touch is the hair of the creature's head, shown in profile. It appears to be flapping and curving like leaves or flags. This form will reappear on Chimera in the *Avatar* story, but as fabric about her feet. The tree limb that the creature perches on is a familiar Russell form, curving in a semi-circle and twisting unrelentlessly. And on the last page Killraven watches the butterflies flight as Mourning Prey releases them. This recalls a drawing by illustrator Arthur Rackham, which showed a scene of fairies round a tree for Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. All in all, quite an impressive end to a notable strip (Coincidentally, *The Chimera*, *Dr. Strange*, and this issue of *Killraven* all came out in the same year, 1976).

With *Parsifal* (scripted by Patrick Mason), the lyrical quality of Russell's art is given full reign. The whole book is filled with trees, flowers, and a landscape rich in velvety colours and seductive forms. The range of facial expressions begins to expand, as Russell experiments with making faces more elastic, pliable and free. The experimentation has some flaws—notably the fact of Parsifal is not as stylistically consistent as it ought to be. But this is a flaw that shows Russell's willingness to take risks in order to push his art forward. With Parsifal's figure, we see Russell's style begin to influence his anatomy with the result being a more graceful human figure. Since *Parsifal* relies heavily on character reaction to communicate the drama and the narrative is taken from opera (not the usual source for comic stories), Russell must experiment with the malleability of the human face in order to make the story work.

Two of my favorite sequences simply show a character shifting expression. The first shows Klingsor in five panels as he tells us of his occult power. His hands and body twist and turn as his face shifts from one loony expression after another, all communicating his arrogance and smugness. The second involves Kundry, after she has kissed Parsifal, which has failed to "bring him to submission." Again, a five panel sequence is used to show us expressions that subtly change from suspicion to doubt to worry to a tentatively expressed hope. Many comic artists don't even try to render a variety of expressions, but Russell has consistently expanded the range of attitudes open to his characters, to the point where he is not just altering lines on a face but attempting to illustrate the internal thought process in the character behind that face.

Perhaps this is the reason I can envision Russell's characters as real. His stylizations always seem to "get" at something that captures the energy of real people, rather like Japanese prints, where the drawing is far from realistic, yet seem real because the style of the line approximates the truth of an object, or person.

Parsifal also affords us a glimpse at not one, but two, of those bald headed characters that seem to appear in Russell's strips with such regularity. Klingsor is the obvious example, and he will re-appear in *Night Music*, *Avatar*, and *Elric*. And don't be fooled by the hair on Sir Gawain—it's really our old friend Old Skull. I have no idea what baldness symbolizes to Russell. Perhaps, like the question of whether G'Rath is a giraffe, it must stand with the pyramids as a timeless mystery.

An interesting artistic lapse occurs in

WHY DOES HE SPEAK THE WORDS OF AMFORTAS?
AND WHY DID MY KISS NOT BRING HIM TO SUBMISSION?
NO ONE HAS EVER RESISTED ME!
HE HAS OVERCOME THE POWER OF THE CASTLED WIZARD WHO BINDS ME BY THE CURSE I BEAR!
COULD HE NOT ALSO OVERCOME THE POWER OF THE CURSE ITSELF!
OH, GOD!
WHY MUST I SEEK MY OWN DESTRUCTION WHEN I YEARN FOR RELEASE?

The use of an economic line to suggest a full variety of expressions and moods is seen in these five panels from *Parsifal* as Kundry considers Parsifal's resistance to her charms

the panel showing Christ, with Kundry laughing in the background. It's a perfunctory panel, drawn without any apparent commitment to the image. Admittedly, to render this scene effectively after all the cliches that abound is well-nigh impossible, but I also suspect that Russell's energies were not engaged by this scene, which roots the story in a historical religious event rather than the general mythic universe Russell delineates time and time again. By historical, I don't mean to enter the debate of whether Christ existed or not; I simply mean that there is an actual Christian religion, and that this is their symbol

There is only one full page image in *Parsifal*, and it portrays the evaporation of Klingsor's castle as the spells that created it are sucked back into themselves. It is an implosion, rendered elaborately and dramatically against a star-lit background. Yet this drawing has a different feel to it than other Russell implosions, and that difference also illustrates a shift in the rest of *Parsifal*, as well. Russell's art is crisper and cleaner than it was. Things are drawn with a simple, direct quality that has removed all of the elements except those absolutely necessary to the narrative. This deceptive simplicity is what struck me when I first saw Part One in black and white in *Star-Reach*. At first, I wasn't sure what Russell was up to, for it was so different from his other pieces. Then, I began to see how Russell was only drawing what he felt was necessary, what he felt was emotionally correct, leaving out extraneous details. I became aware of Russell's line as an independent force in the narrative. And of course, this "independent force" hasn't turned back, since

How well I remember the spring that *The Avatar and The Chimera* (Part One) appeared in *Image* #2. The year of 1978 was one full of the talk of Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelite imagery in comics. Remember, '78 was the year Smith became

Water, this time from *Avatar and the Chimera*. It is a shame the colour of this piece can't be printed, as Russell did a lovely job on it (in all of *Avatar*, as a matter of fact), capturing the tones of this underwater environment in nice pale tones. In any event, this is the scene where Avatar and Chimera meet face-to-phantasm

Windsor-Smith, and the *The Studio* book was announced. Smith's posters graced most of the comic stores, and many of us eagerly awaited the combination of all these new ideas into comic form. And then, as if out of nowhere, Russell's Symbolist fantasy appears, and without any hoohah, accomplished what others only talked of accomplishing (And it was textless, to boot!). It's appearance prompted me to write to *Imagine* a huge letter of which only a small portion saw print (an embarrassingly small portion, I might add). However, it is this letter that put Russsell in touch with me, and the resultant correspondence between us culminated in my doing this article. I tell all of this as a way of saying why I have a special affection for this comic, which knocked me out when I first saw it and is still quite compelling to me, years later.

I have pointed out how this strip is related to *The Chimera*, except that the hero in *The Avatar and the Chimera* is transformed, and the Chimera is not a deadly force, but a captive one seeking release (This theme is nicely echoed by the usage of Michelangelo's statue, "Dying Slave" which reinforces the theme of captivity/release). When *The Chimera* ends in energy being drawn into itself, *The Avatar* opens up, and the progression of this strip is towards light and freedom. Part One opens in the night, which will become day in Part Two. And, like *Parsifal*, the progression of the art is towards simplicity, while the color becomes more and more intense and lush.

This lushness is evident in the watery feel of the opening, the pale white-veined blue of the temple set off against the purple and gold of its ornamentation, while rain falls about it. The forest that the Avatar walks in, with blues and greens predominating, is also rich in texture, and tempts the Avatar to stay and gaze at his image in a pool of water. But sudden drops of rain pull him into action again, as we see the image of the Chimera reflected where the Avatar's was.

The Avatar's entrance into the temple also contains three panels I'm fond of for no special reason, except that they add mood to the story. As the Avatar enters a doorway, a small bat-like figure slams the door shut, revealing the image of a heart pierced with a knife while blood drips down on it. It's not a big thing, but it adds its own eerie touch to the proceedings, and reinforces the fairy tale atmosphere of the piece.

The panel after this is also a favorite. As a staircase winds down (adapted from Art Nouveau architect Hector Guimard), we see the Avatar enter on the far right, while the center of the page reveals the Chimera, down a long corridor foating in the distance.

Some of the things I particularly enjoy are the checkerboard design on the floor in the temple; the black and white patterns on the moulding along the walls; the green and blue of the walls themselves, which echo the water motif; and the actual entrance of the Avatar into the Chimera's watery world (By the way, the usage of mirrors as doorways recalls Cocteau's *Orpheus* film). The flowing lines of the Chimera's costume, the curving lines of the water itself, and the way that the Avatar's cape swirls up to form a red halo about his head are wonderful little touches, as are the rather nasty looking fish who inhabit the scene (Their presence also maintains the sense that all is not so well here).

One flaw at this point of the story is that the faces of the Avatar and the Chimera lack depth as they embrace each other. In any event it is not a flaw that disturbs me that much.

And then, there's the "bonk" that knocks the Avatar out (Something that links it to *The Chimera*—the hero gets bonked there, too). I guess it's just an absence of mood that bothers me about this. After all, Russell has gone out of his way to establish a mystical mood, a fairy-tale atmosphere. And then what happens? A huge monstrosity appears, and simply bonks our hero out cold. It just squeezes by, but cuts too close to comedy for comfort. However, there is so much going on in this comic that a few flaws can be tolerated, and Part Two more than makes up for a "bonk."

In Part Two, the blues and greens give way to yellows and reds, as the strip heads out of water and night into sky and day. Of course, we encounter Klingsor in the form of the demon captor, who is murdered by the Avatar in a panel that shows us a close up of arms blackly silhouetted against a yellow background, as the blood that spurts from the knife seems to explode out of the wound in its redness.

As the comic progresses to the outside, the oppressiveness of the interiors gives way to the open vistas of a brightly lit plain, where the yellow of the sun takes over, infusing all with light. The sun plays a role in the panel transition of page six. As the Avatar breaks the knife he spots the tower with the sun behind it, and as he heads towards it, the sun forms a halo about him. As he grasps the key to open the door, the key emanates light, and once inside the tower, the suit of armor emanates light as well. Finally, the helmet that the Avatar reaches for seems to glow, sun-like. When he bursts through the water, wearing the armor, he blots out the sun, ineffect becoming a surrogate. And then, reunited with the Chimera, they both sail into the sun, ending the strip.

In terms of the character, the Avatar move out of innocence and ignorance (night) into an intermediate state (the water) where he experiences love for the Chimera, but must use brutal means (the land of ice) to free her. Finally, he destroys the knife, and is permitted knowledge (the sun) and may now, a fully realized being, embrace the Chimera.

Once again, an outline can not capture the grace of Russell's artwork, with its lovely patterns, elaborate swirls and delicate colours.

I was not prepared for *Siegfried*—it seemed more modest, more relaxed than what I had come to expect from Russell. I also felt that the dragon, lacked an evil presence—it was a bit too Walt Disneyish for my taste. However, when I reread the strip, I came to see many things in it that I had overlooked. The major achievement in *Siegfried* is the figure of Siegfried himself. The rendering of the face achieves a stylistic unity throughout, and the concentration on one protagonist links it (very loosely) to *Dance On A Razor's Edge*, which we will deal with a little later. I'm also fond of the very rich and deep colour in this strip. The last page with the deep blue tones of the sky and the scarlet of the vegetation is a good of example of this. Also, the strip continues Russell's muscial interests, adapted as it is from the Wagner Opera.

This brings us to Russell's *Curse of the Ring* portfolio, which Russell considers his "true" portfolio (*The Chimera* is a graphic story that happens to be a portfolio). The six plates have a stylistic variety. Of the many images presented here as visualizations of Richard Wagner's Opera Cycle, *Ring of the Nibelung*, my favorites are plate one, plate five, and plate six.

Plate One, which shows three of the opera's main characters, owes something to the vertical designs of Barry Windsor-Smith, but there is enough Russell style here to overcome any objections. Of the three characters illustrated, I'm fondest of Siegmund, with his precise profile, swirling cloak, and immobile stance. It is interesting to note the movement of the three panels—Hunding, portrayed on the left panel, the barbaric figure, seems to move downward, a sense reinforced by the circles that grow larger and more patterned as our eye moves down the page, and by his body tilting to the left, as if weighted down on one side. Siegmund, the father of Siegfried (though he will not live to see his son), is on the right of the page, and his upright stance directs our eyes up the panel, reinforced by the cloak that twists and turns about his head and off frame left. This outward curve is also established by the three circles that link at the bottom left of this panel. These three circles take your eye down, the figure of Siegmund takes it up, and the cloak takes it out of the page entirely.

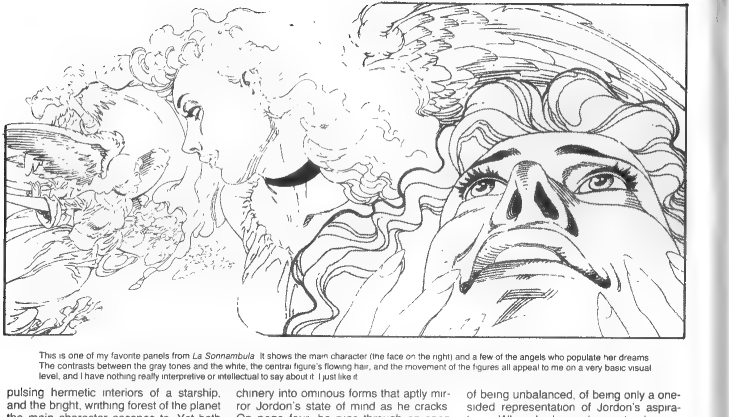
Caught in the middle (in the page and in the opera), Seiglinde, the wife of Hunding but the incestuous lover to Siegmund, is "floating" in her panel, not quite up or down. Looking at the three panels as a full plate, one sees that Hunding and Siegmund form swirling presences about the figure of Seiglinde, with Hunding's figure carrying us to the left and Siegmund's recycling us to the right and then the left, which takes us to Seiglinde, and back to Hunding, who in turn takes us to . But you get the idea.

With plate five, Russell offers us an eerie portrait of Siegfried, in the process of sampling the dragon's blood that allows him to understand the language of nature. The two elements that I find disquieting are the eyes and lips of Siegfried's face. The eyes are slits, observant and somehow suspicious. The lips are over-ripe and take on a morbid aspect as the dragon's blood runs down them. These two elements create a very odd mood to the whole drawing, which is highly decorated and static; the panel seems frozen, a moment caught in a flash. Despite the bird on Siegfried's right, which seems animate, there is a stillness both in the drawing, and in the general tone of the piece.

Plate six, the whackiest of all, features the Norns who weave the web of fate that is soon to break and bring the Norns' wisdom to an end. Russell has filled the page with symbols of the opera, and linked the whole with the threads of the Norns, who are shown in the foreground, very prominently in white (the backgrounds are in shades of gray). It is simply an illustration of energy going mad, of forces losing logical control. The figures of the Norns themselves are peculiar—a strange cross of mythic entities and burlesque queeens. This is one of those drawings you either like or don't like. I like it—it's got a zest to it that just tumbles all over the place.

Frankly, I was worried when I heard that Russell was going to script as well as draw; "Breakdown On the Starship Remembrance" in *Night Music*. Many comic artists have proven to be notoriously self-indulgent when given the chance to write as well as draw—how many times have we seen an artist's comic where the art is wonderful but the story barely servicable? My fears were totally dispelled when I finally read *Breakdown*, for Russell not only weds his story to his art, the story is good on its own terms (this is also true of *Dance On A Razor's Edge*). Essentially, this story deals with a basic human conflict—the desire to be free and in the open, and the reality of being encased, limited, and surrounded. The two landscapes used to illustrate this theme consist of the

These finely rendered panels depict Siegfried (from- what else?- *Siegfried*) as he attempts to imitate a bird's song. The attention to the face and its subtle shifts is more apparent here than in earlier work, and the anatomy of Siegfried is closer to Russell's ideas than past forms were. Note also the square trees, which appears in many Russell landscapes.



This is one of my favorite panels from *La Sonnambula*. It shows the main character (the face on the right) and a few of the angels who populate her dreams. The contrasts between the gray tones and the white, the central figure's flowing hair, and the movement of the figures all appeal to me on a very basic visual level, and I have nothing really interpretive or intellectual to say about it. I just like it.

pulsing hermetic interiors of a starship, and the bright, writhing forest of the planet the main character escapes to. Yet both landscapes are all-enclosing, and mirror each other. Russell offers us two endings —one where Jordon (the main character) stays on the planet and destroys the space pod he used to get there and another where he decides to use the pod to explore the stars.

I favor the second, as that ending fulfills the energy of the narrative, which is constantly thriving to be free and in the open, always questing for the stars. In a flashback, we see Jordon's childhood, spent in dreams inspired by comic books which fire his imagination. Additionally, he often camps in the woods, communing with nature and the stars beyond. His desire is to join the stars by dreaming of sailing among them, a desire squelched by the "routine of the well-run organization" he finds as a space cadet, travelling on the starship. He takes the pod to the planet, and finds an escape from the oppressive interiors of the ship. But the planet strikes me as limiting as the ship, for Jordon's desire is not to return to the nature of his youth but to seek the stars. The pod, as an intermediary, offers the perfect opportunity to do this. Although still a machine, it is not as dehumanizing as the huge ship, and Jordon can now go wherever his desires wish to take him. I much preferred the open-ended nature of this ending because it was a believeable fulfillment of the dissatisfaction that motivated Jordon to rebel at the beginning of the story.

The art used to tell this story is a mixture of all Russell's styles, blending the Symbolist influence effortlessly into the straight narrative panel. Russell turns the machinery into ominous forms that aptly mirror Jordon's state of mind as he cracks On page four, he runs through an open doorway which seems about to crush him by closing its animal-like fangs. On page five, the interiors seem prison-like, swallowing him up, as he is brought to the infirmary, where we meet (who else?) Dr. Klingsor. Even when Jordon leaves in the pod, wires and metallic forms seem to reach out of the airlock towards him, trying to pull him back into the confines of the ship.

The art on the plant takes a different tack altogether. The sun-lit landscape overflowing with trees and vegetation contrasts nicely with the clustered, claustrophobic, florescent ship interior overrun with its incessant lightbulbs and dials (I must confess, I like the usage of old-style radio and TV tubes in the starship's machinery—There's nothing like science-fiction interiors that resemble the insides of old black and white TVs!) Page 15 again illustrates the difference between ship and planet. A gnarled branch surges our in one panel, swirling with its own life, the second panel offers huge sunflowers, growing about Jordon's face and the last panel (one of my favorites) shows us Jordon's feet running through water, the toes of the left leg spread out in motion, while the right strains with muscular tension. (Those spread toes are perhaps a minor touch, who else would show such marvelous attention to such a small anatomical detail?)

The energetic outburst of nature on this page contrasts quite nicely with the cold surfaces of the ship, but like the ship it is still an extreme. While this extreme may seem more inviting, it still has the feeling of being unbalanced, of being only a one-sided representation of Jordon's aspirations. When Jordon is shown standing under a waterfall, surrounded by trees, rocks, clouds, and glowing sun, he seems as diminutive as he did on the ship. In fact, his figure is almost unnoticeable among all the foliage. For me, Jordon can fulfill the responsibility of his original desire (to go among the stars) only by taking the pod and leaving, and it is in this second ending that Jordon appears to be drawn as more mature. The text seems to favor the second ending as well; in the first ending, when Jordon is preparing to destroy the pod, he is described as "grinning crazily..." In the second, as he approaches the pod to take off, the text describes him as "laughing merrily". I find the second description a more balanced one. Also, when Jordon sits at the pod's controls in the second ending, the machinery flows rhythmically and organically behind him, unlike the jarring lights and threatening metallic points of the ship, the pod seems to cushion him, to invite him into its form and use it to realize his goal.

In this comic, there are none of the inconsistencies that plagued earlier strips, and there is a nice tension between the black and white and grey tones. I used to have a distasteful response to the presence of grey tones, as the "punty" of black and white appealed to me, but Russell handles the tones in such a way that they become a textural component that helps define background and foreground without muddying either. My favorite usage of this occurs in two places, both involving the infirmary. In the first example, Jordon lies on the examination table. His face is reflected in a mirror (or screen)

as the doctor stands in shadow, and several other figures are seen in the distance. In the foreground, a pile of web-like machinery sprawls, and a space cadet stands looming over the table, talking with the doctor. Jordon is distinct in this panel because he is drawn in black and white, while other elements are in grey. The usage of grey tones increases our unease as it makes all forms shadowy and mysterious, which totally justifies Jordon's expression of worry (as pictured in the mirror).

In the second example, Jordon is recovering from his flashback and the effects of the sedative, and is seen in an overhead shot, drawn (again) in black and white, while above him grey and black lamps loom out into the panel, and beneath the table, lights and dials recede downward. At table level, three nasty looking probes (resembling hypodermic needles) intrude on Jordon's space. Once again, the usage of grey helps bring Jordon's plight into focus, but here it suggests resolve rather then unease. Jordon, after his flashback, knows he must escape, and his black and white form dominates the gray of the panel, where as before, the gray over-powered the black and white

And how can I not mention Russell's brilliantly drawn title page, which shows Jordon, full of dread and hugging himself, surrounded by nasty machines and eyeball-like devices, which recede into the page? The usage of semi-circles and round forms to contain the figures is reminiscent of Alphonse Mucha. But where Mucha's graceful art nouveau arabesques suggested nature's order and beauty, Russell's are full of ominous intent, suggesting the cold order of a technology gone beserk. The semi-naked figure of Jordon only increases his vulnerability around the sharp points and constricting spaces of the drawing.

While this comic is superbly rendered, there is only one extremely minor error—the pod hatch opens differently at the end of the story then at the beginning. I know, it's a real nit-picky comment, but in such perfectly costructed panels as these, it stood out (Besides, what kind of critic am I if I can't find at least one)

La Sonnambula definitely clinches Russell's ability to tell textless stories effortlessly. A fairy tale about dreams and nightmares, it uses images of angels to take us soaring into clouds and sky, freed of gravity (and reality) Also, I'm fond of the monster who threatens the heroine at one point One of those screwy amorphous masses that Russell renders so well, it again illustrates his ability to make creatures that are both seductive and eerie at the same time

Finally, the end page of *Night Music* features a four panel drawing of waves, surging and bubbling and curving in delicate black line. This simple little drawing proves Russel's ability to capture water once again, if anyone still needed convincing. Like the wave in *Dr. Strange*, I find that I can just look at these panels not for any narrative ideas or symbolic resonances, but for simple pleasure—they're compelling for their curves alone.

Although *Dane On A Razor's Edge* comes after *Dr. Strange*, I have saved it for here because it is so unlike any of Russell's other works. A very pared-down narrative, it concerns the suicide of a man called Kimitake, and features no other characters. Russell based the story on the suicide of the Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima who was something of a Renaissance man in Japan. Among other things, he wrote plays, and was an actor who often played in gangster films. He also formed a private army and was obsessive about his physical fitness To read this story after the elaborate structures of *Killraven* or *Dr. Strange*, is something of a shock, for the style is much simpler than Russell's other works

The narrative details Kimitake's final

YOU DO SEEM WISE, BRUTE. THOUGH YOU FAILED TO TEACH ME FEAR, PERHAPS YOU CAN TEACH ME SOMETHING ELSE I DO NOT KNOW—
WHERE DO I COME FROM?
MY NAME IS SIEGFRIED!
SIEGFRIED

Man and nature, from *Siegfried* This lovely pastoral drawing again shows the attention to Siegfried s face that is characteristic of the whole piece

moments, as he sits in a bare room with the knife poised to cut his bowels open in the Japanese ritual called seppuku, improperly called hara-kiri. Some may find this way of committing suicide elaborate—you take a knife and literally carve open a "hatch" in your abdomen, allowing your innards to spill out. To properly complete the ritual, your head is then cut off by someone else. (Mishima did not precisely follow ritual; seppuku is meant to be private, and Mishima's was performed publicly, a fact many Japanese found in "bad taste").

As Kimitake begins to carve, we are given three flashbacks—Kimitake as a child, one of his dreams at the age of fourteen, and the fragment of a story Kimitake wrote (adapted from a Mishima fragment) at seventeen. These flashbacks are drawn in a very linear black and white style, to contrast with the heavy shadows and tones used to show the present Kimitake, now twenty.

Russell has managed in this story to encapsulate many of Mishima's obsessions with remarkable clarity. Although it is not necessary to know Mishima, it does help to enrich the narrative. For example, the story Kimitake wrote, about St Sebastian and lilies, could easily have come from the hand of a nineteenth-century decadent, and it is clever of Russell to pick up on this, for Mishima was a fan of decadence (for example, writers like Baudelaire and Huysmans). Also, making Kimitake twenty is a nice touch: Mishima, in one of his last pieces (*Sun and Steel*), wrote of his realization that he no longer found literary expression valid for his ideas. "A lyric poet of twenty might manage it," he wrote, "but I am twenty no longer." When he died, Mishima was forty-five. The fear of watching his flesh age (his novels are obsessed with this point), may be one of the reasons he killed himself. It is appropriate for Russell to have his protagonist twenty when he decides to do himself in.

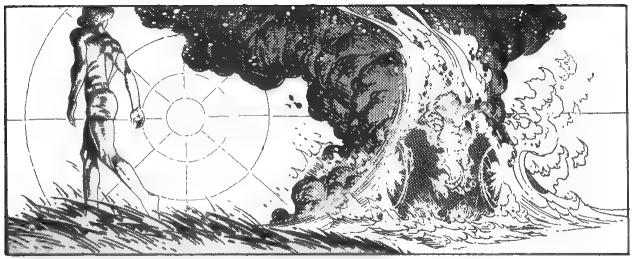
All in all, Russell has created a remarkable "take" on Mishima's death, getting a mood and a feel that communicates his art and death precisely and economically. The desire for purity that turns morbid, the tension of the flesh as the knife burns into it are nicely captured in Russell's art and text. Once again, I am struck by Russell's clear-headed approach to romanticism. This strip could easily have indulged in the same morbidity that marks many of Mishima's works, but doesn't. It is a crisp straight-to-the-bone comic, and shows why Russell's romanticism works so much better than many other artists who claim the title "romantic" as well. Russell is not afraid to see the negative as well as the positive in romanticism, and to show us all sides of his obsession.

Additionally, Russell is not pretentious—he is not bombastic or interested in taking a high-handed approach to his audience. He is devoid of the "suffering artist" syndrome that plagues so many other artists. He offers us his art without apologies or excuses, which is refreshing. And he is clear about his ideas—fascinated by romanticism, he does not mindlessly indulge in it, but uses his clarity of line to detail it so concisely that no matter how soaring the ideas or feelings, Russell's precise approach makes it accessible to the general reader. Everything is clear in Russell's universe, and while Russell may strive to express the romantic ideal of Wagner or Bruckner, the effect of his line is to gently draw us into a lyrical rhythm, rather then swallow us up whole in a wave of pure aesthetics.

Before we leave *Dance*, I must mention the panel where Kimitake completes his cut, which is a triumph of visual understatement. Russell tells us "his bowls slid down over his immaculate white pants..." and the drawing shows, not a gruesome intestinal splatter, but a tight close-up of lips parted, with blood trickling down. However, the rendering of the white teeth

On the operating table, Jordon considers his position on the starship, and decides to leave it. The claustrophobic feelings Jordon experiences are well illustrated by the harsh lights and encroaching machinery that surrounds him.

Feet, from *Remembrance*. I really like the spanning of the toes (hey, it's something you don't see very often in comics) which shows Russell's attention to small matters. like, well, like *toes*.



is such that they give the mouth the look of an open wound, and I first thought the picture was of the *cut* in the abdomen, till I noticed the hair of the beard and moustache. It is a panel that uses suggestive imagery to—well, let's just say it gives me a very funny feeling in the pit of my stomach.

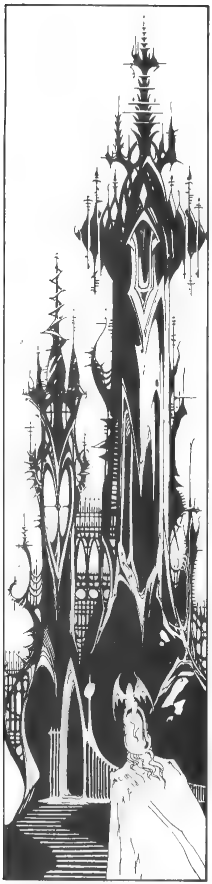
Although *Elric* has not been released in completed form yet, I have been privileged to see the original coloured pages, minus the text. It is intense, and drawn at what must have been fever-pitch, for the tension of this strip is incredible. This is evident in the figure of Elric himself, drawn as a thin pale wraith, as if dead. Other artists have tried their hand at Elric, but none have captured him as well as Russell. This is comic art at its finest, brilliantly independent, rather then mere backdrop for a bunch of word balloons. In fact, the narrative sense is so strong, that although there were no word balloons or text in the unpublished sections, I was still able to follow it without too much trouble (Russell spoke of drawing *Elric* straight from Moorcock's story, which probably accounts for this fluidity).

Having developed his anatomical type with *Siegfried*, Russell includes all the other types he can draw as well—*Elric* is a veritable smorgasbord of faces, forms, and expressions. Consider the five panels in Part One where five of the six Sea Lords are shown, all with varying expressions. Each is definitely a "type", yet each have a reality, a full-blooded feel to them. What I like here is the ability to render faces realistically, without sacrificing the style of the line to that realism. This is one of the razor's edge many comic artists cut themselves on: they sacrifice the quality of their line in a misguided attempt to make their figures more real, more photographic. In so doing, they lose what makes (for me, anyway) comic art interesting, style—the specific expression of a specific individual as revealed in their line (I am not a fan of the trend to "paint" comics, eliminating the line altogether). Russell has managed to achieve a realism of effect without giving up the style that gives life to that effect.

The figure of Yrkoon is a perfect example. Drawn from a model whom Russell photographed, his psychotic expressions are rendered lovingly and carefully. Yet never does Yrkoon simply look like he was drawn straight from a photograph, for Russell's style is always there, breathing life into the imagery.

The tone of *Elric* becomes darker and more morbid as it continues. The tones and colors get progressively more nightlike, and the figure of Elric transforms as well, graphically brought out by his donning of a war helmet, upon which rests a dragon. Immediately, his expressions turn vicious, merciless. A brutal panel shows him as he prepares to slaughter the inhabitants of Imrryr. His mouth twisted, his eyes set with brutal intent, his arms ready to slay with his sword, Elric appears a different figure from the worried sickly soul he appeared in Part One. In the next panel (full page), he swings Stormbringer, filling

Two ways of ending, from *Remembrance*. At top, Jordon walks away from the burning pod, having elected to destroy it and stay on the planet. In the second ending (bottom) Jordon walks toward the pod and enters it, having elected to leave the planet for the stars. (My vote is with this ending.)



The dark tower Elric faces is in the form of other Russell architecture, except here Russell has used bold patches of black to indicate the malevolence and mystery of the building instead of his usual delicate line

Like the character of Elric, this drawing plays on tensions within itself. The precise curve of the ship is played against the fluid curve of Elric's cape. And Elric himself is drawn stoically, almost nobly, but his position is undercut by the ropes which seem to imprison him, and the bow of the ship, which seems to diminish him. (The needled points at the tip of the bow take on a threatening aspect as well.)

the air with its ghastly magic, as it slays Yrkoon's soldiers.

And speaking of Stormbringer I am pleased with Russell's rendering. It is a difficult object to portray, for it is described as quite large and incredibly black, with only glimpses of the rune-writing on it visible as it swings about. As such, it is a cumbersome object to portray. Russell's compromise is to suggest the blackness and rune-writing, and to make the sword normal sized. Rather then relying on literal description Russell shows us the savagery of this weapon by graphically portraying its ability to wreak intense devastation and murder on its enemies, and even on its friends.

Elric's transformation into a bloodthirsty warrior continues until he enters battle with Yrkoon, a battle where he accidentally murders Cymoril, his love. His face wracked with pain, his helmet falls off and we see the gaunt, tired Elric of Part One, an Elric who has seen countless horrors, and now witnesses his ultimate act of horror.

The whole fight sequence is impossible to accurately render in words—it is mad as Yrkoon uses his own rune-sword to fight Elric's. Yrkoon's expressions resemble the grinning of a demon (he literally seems to exude heat at one point, as his whole face emits steam), and his expression of triumph as Elric spots Cymoril (still entranced and asleep) is exultant in the ghastliest sort of way. As for Cymoril, there is one marvelous panel of her, still asleep, with her hair rolling rhythmically down her pillow and on to the floor.

The sequence when she is grabbed by Yrkoon and thrust into Elric's sword is concise: as the sword cuts into Cymoril, a horizontal panel shows us Elric's hands on his sword; the sword entering the wound; Cymoril's hands; and the blood gushing from the wound, which splatters the sword and one of Elric's hands. On the next page is a vertical panel of Elric, as one of Cymoril's hands reaches towards his face, and she slowly sinks out of the panel. In between them, Yrkoon laughs (demonically, of course—I don't know who the model for Yrkoon is, but I'd hate to meet him in a dark alleyway). The next three panels show close up of Elric, torn by pain; then Cymoril, eyes widening in death; and Yrkoon, "the black hellspawn", looking about as hellspawn as hellspawn could get (This is where he literally steams at the collar). The final page of the story shows Elric tossing his sword overboard, which quickly reduces him to the weak albino he is (for without the sword he has no strength), and, unable to reach the sword,

he dives into the murky water, and, grasping the sword again, his face becomes as ghoulish as Yrkoon's. As Elric swims off, the story ends.

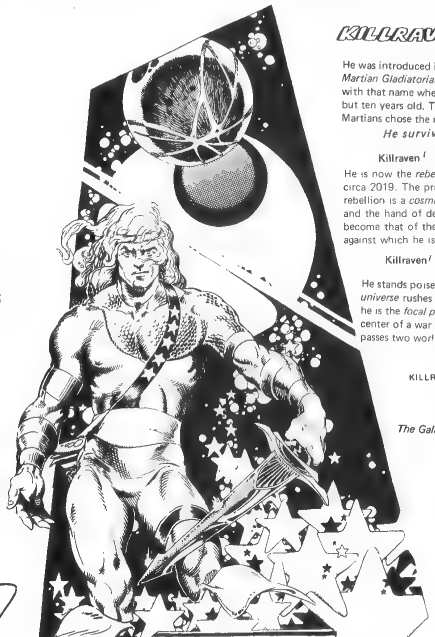
I have talked earlier of how this story affords Russell a chance to express the negative and darker sides of his art. Well, Russell does this with a vengeance—the art is extremely tight and inked with unusual precision, as if Russell rose to meet Moorcock's nihilism by adapting it to the more delicate style of his comic art narrative.

P. Craig Russell is a relatively young artist and his work shows nothing but promise for the future. I eagerly await what his work will look like with five or ten years further development. As for now, his vitality, his willingness to push his art and his ideas, and his dedication to his craft all mark him with distinction. Certainly, those not familiar with his art are the poorer for it, for it is in contact with such artists that we find ourselves renewed. Our vision refreshed, we may also see the world renewed, made green by the artist's hand. ■

The energy of Russell's line is easily seen in Cymoril's hair, which flows rhythmically down to her pillow to the floor. The hair also centers the image and brings your eye up the drawing to Cymoril's sleeping form.

Stan Lee PRESENTS: WAR OF THE WORLDS

THE DEATH MERCHANT!



KILLRAVEN!

He was introduced into the *Martian Gladiatorial Arenas* with that name when he was but ten years old. The Martians chose the name well.

He survived!

Killraven!

He is now the *rebel incarnate* circa 2019. The price for that rebellion is a *cosmic bounty*... and the hand of death has become that of the galaxy against which he is framed.

Killraven!

He stands poised, and the *universe* rushes in at him, as if he is the *focal point*, the exact center of a war that encompasses two worlds.

KILLRAVEN!

The Galactic Warrior!

DON McGREGOR, WRITER
CRAIG RUSSEL, ARTIST & COLORIST

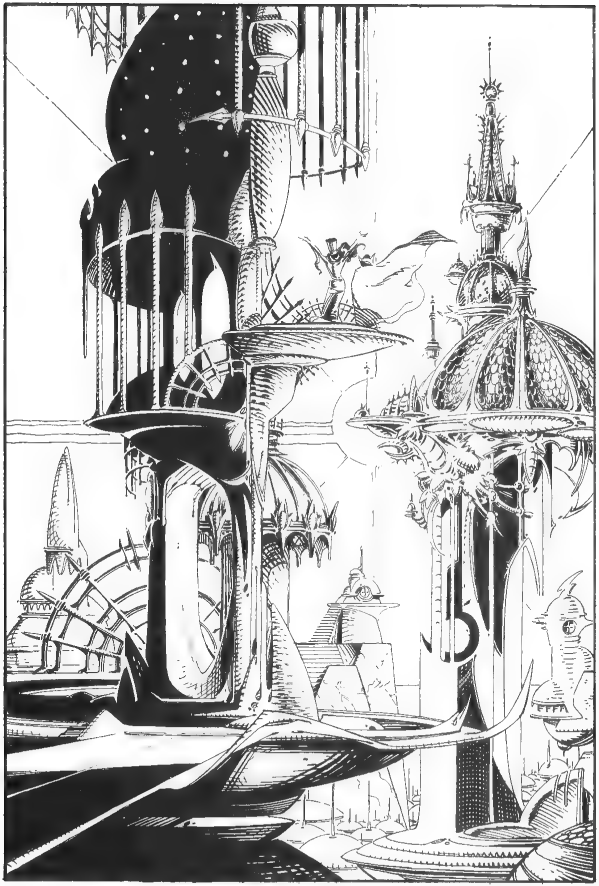
ROGER SLIFER, LETTERER
ROY THOMAS, EDITOR

This title page from Issue 26 of *War of the Worlds/Killraven* is an excellent example of Russell's early style. The stars are a motif Russell will use over and over again, but the anatomy of Killraven has yet to develop into the graceful anatomy of Russell's later work. Here, the figure seems slightly uncomfortable, as if expressing its own doubts about the bulging muscles of its form. Despite this, there is a real playfulness in the image. Killraven is not pictured as the steel-eyed, square-jawed "Galactic Warrior." Instead he, has a quizzical, wry look, as if somewhat humoured by his position among the stars. And the anatomy, though over-muscled, is softened by Russell's line, giving it a more human construction. All in all, this is one of my favorite drawings from the series.

INTERIM II:
METAMORPHOSIS
LOOK AT IT OUT THERE IN THE SUN SPLASHED TREES, YOU SEE IT, YOU'VE SEEN IT BEFORE, THOUGH YOU HAVE NEVER REALLY SEEN IT. YOU ACKNOWLEDGE ITS EXISTENCE AND RELUCTANTLY GRANT IT ITS BEAUTY, AND PRETEND TO CARE THAT YOU KNOW IT IS THERE, RATHER BUTTERFLIES THAN CATERPILLARS, BANISH THE CATERPILLARS,
REPLACE THEM WITH DELICATE BUTTERFLIES AND DELUDE YOURSELF INTO BELIEVING YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO FACE IT.

Mourning Prey is born, from the last *War of the Worlds*. This drawing is an elegant introduction to Russell's later style. The linework is looser and the feel of the imagery is lighter than in earlier drawings. Note how Russell's line is expressing only what needs to be expressed, as seen in the limb Mourning Prey is posed on. Its twisted form expresses a forceful surging life that complements Mourning Prey's own desire for freedom as she stretches out, ready for flight. (Certainly, McGregor couldn't hope for a better illustration to his cryptic caption.)

For my money, there was Ditko's *Dr. Strange* and then there is Russell's. It took him three years to complete his *Dr. Strange Annual*, and it looks it, from the construction of the panels to the delicacy of the colouring. In this page, Strange is entering a mystic realm (as always). The simplicity of the design is most appealing here, especially as viewed without the word balloons.



Say, isn't that a Medieval spire on that building? Sure but isn t that building on the bottom from Raymond s *Flash Gordon*? But wait a minute, that's an art nouveau curve there, but the other part looks like art deco When it comes to architecture, Russell's style knows no aesthetic boundaries This eclectic example is from the *Dr Strange Annual* (Note the stylized sun, a motif which will appear again and again in Russell's work)

Forget that this page is from a comic, and consider it just for the motifs and patterns. Note how the circles in the drawing help carry your eye through the picture, and how the checkerboard pattern links the two figures at the top to the winged figure at the left, thus isolating the woman on the right (Of course, this is what actually happens in the comic) It s not necessary to notice this patterning, or how it works, but it s one more way in which Russell carefully structures his panels

FINISHING THE CUT, KIMITAKE FELT A SLIGHT TICKLE AT THE BACK OF HIS THROAT, AS IF A SMALL WHITE FEATHER WERE ABOUT TO SLIDE DOWN TO HIS STOMACH.

HE SUPPRESSED A CHOKING SENSATION—

—AND A SLIGHT TREMOR RAN DOWN THE LENGTH OF HIS TORSO.

AT THE END OF THE TREMOR THERE WAS A PAUSE AS THE UNIVERSE TILTED ON THE MOST IMPOSSIBLE OF AXIS.

ANOTHER PAUSE AND A WHISPERING WET SOUND OF THE UTMOST INTIMACY—

—AND HIS BOWELS SLID DOWN OVER HIS IMMACULATE WHITE PANTS AND DOWN ONTO THE FLOOR— THE CORE OF THE APPLE EXPOSED TO THE SUN—ASSERTING ITS FINAL DEADLY PROOF OF EXISTENCE.

A page from *Dance On A Razor's Edge*. This story was done after *Dr. Strange*, and has yet to be published. Russell employed two styles to communicate the story of a suicide and both are shown on this page. A stark, more photographic style was used to show the main character as he prepares to cut his bowels open, and a lighter simpler line was used to draw the flashbacks and dreams the character has, as illustrated by the lines on the bottom left panel. This story was a real attempt to plunge comics into a realm not usually dealt with. As such, I eagerly await its forthcoming publication in *Heavy Metal*.

THE EARTH ROCKS IN ITS TIMELESS PATH AS THE EVIL INTENT OF CENTURIES OF BLACK MAGIC DRAWS TOGETHER IN A DEAFENING AND HORRIFIC
IMPLOSION
OF ITSELF...
...AND ALL THE ASPIRATIONS OF A FEEBLE MAN LAY CRUMPLED AMONG THE ROCKS AND RUIN.

This page from *Parsifal* offers us a chance to see Russell's line go wild as he portrays the dissolution of Klingsor's evil kingdom. By contrast, the inset panel shows a calm scene, as Klingsor lies dead. Russell often uses such contrasts—a scene of unabated motion followed by one of calm reflection, or simplicity

The Avatar approaches the Chimera's temple, from part one of *Avatar and the Chimera*. The colour in this strip helped delineate its themes and ideas, and in this scene the colours were the blues, blacks, and greens of night and water, colours which helped accentuate the Avatar's innocence and ignorance, and set the mysterious mood of the story. However, in black and white we may appreciate the simplicity of the narrative and the elegance of the line.

The Avatar leaves the water (and night) for the heavens (and day) The predominant colours (in the original) are yellow and gold Note the surging, erupting water as the Avatar, having attained enlightenment, rises up to displace the sun

Note the various styles used on this page from *Elric: The Dreaming City*. For example, montage can be seen in the top three panels, and symbolism and Dr Seuss in the garden (Those trees are Circus McGurkus and no one can tell me otherwise!). All in all, this page is characteristic of *Elric* in that Russell uses all of his various styles to tell the story, instead of one dominant mode

The fight between Elric and Yrkoon comes to it's bloody conclusion as Yrkoon (and fate) conspire to rob Elric of his love. As with most of Elric, this page 'reads' easily without the word balloons, again demonstrating Russell's facility to map out the narrative with his drawings. Also note Yrkoon's expressions, which again show Russell s talent for rendering facial transformations. My favorite touch here, however, is not the faces, but the drop of blood that spatters Elric's hand as his sword mortally wounds Cymoril.

The aftermath of the battle Elric has (accidentally) slain Cymoril while Yrkoon gloats The three bold center panels aptly captures the mood of each protagonist, as Elric is blank-eyed with horror Cymoril is just blank-eyed, and Yrkoon is steaming with joy I also like the passion of this page a passion which can be seen in all of *Elric* and indicates that Russell was fully engaged in drawing the story

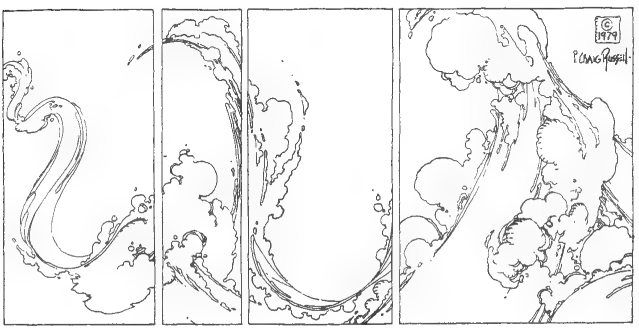
A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

P. Craig Russell has proven with comics like Avatar, Elric, *or* Starship, *that he is a consummate craftsman, and a meticulous artist of the first rank. His efforts push comics into the realm of ideas, and help establish them as a serious medium for story-telling (those who still cry "Kids stuff!" are invited to read* Dance on a Razor's Edge or Parsifal*) It is artists like Russell who keep the comics medium fresh and alive and vital.*

These traits are nothing to sneer at, as so many "traditional" art forms dry-up or seem to be dying. Go to any gallery or museum and study the art of recent years: One look should be enough to convince anyone that the so called "high-arts" are in trouble. Art needs many things to thrive and grow, but above all, it needs an audience to interact with, to respond to. The isolation of so many "fine" artists has resulted in a cultural gulch that is stifling not only art, but our culture as well. Painters, who in the past maintained ties to society and produced works that spoke intimately to the audience that looked at them, now hide away and disdain audiences, refusing to even attempt communication in their art—such things are considered "vulgar." Well, vulgarity, when mixed aesthetics, produced the work of some of the greatest artists (Rembrandt, Rubens, even Picasso, had more than enough "vulgarity to go around").

I simplify of course, but the arts are in trouble and I see promise in artists like Russell who, while developing ever complex styles, still remain in contact with an audience, and advance further for such contact. Comics need an audience; the artists who choose to work in this field do not have the option to close themselves up and give people the finger, for they need an audience, no matter what direction they choose to go in. Visiting a recent show of art in New York City's Whitney Museum, I was again struck by the absence of vitality or ideas in the work of so many contemporary artists, and my companion and I became depressed at the display of one tired work after another. High-art, indeed. And then I returned home to resume work on this article. In Russell, as in comics of the highest order (as in all art of the highest order), lurked those qualities I had sorely missed—above all, the desire, the enthusiasm, to create on paper a vision that communicates a view of the world, and which in turn enriches the audience that looks at it, either by simple beauty, profound ideas, or pleasurable aesthetics. This desire to communicate is present in any of the art that affects us, from the Sistine Chapel to Bugs Bunny cartoons, and if it was present in the Whitney, it was in such an obscure way as to be quite useless. There are contemporary painters and artists who do try to speak to their audiences. Yet, how many of these artists are disdained by critics,who will then eagerly praise the crusty recycling of abstract art—art which once had validity, but is now choking creativity and liveliness in our culture?

Change is the only constant of aesthetic taste, and of life. Who is to say that the comics, neglected by "serious" critics, and still looked down upon by many, will not attain a higher status, as more and more people, desperate for art that speaks to them and their condition, become disenchanted with museums and galleries? Already, the system of concentrating art in the traditional places is being challenged by artists themselves, who balk at the blandness of the current art scene. As far as I'm concerned, there is more intelligence, wit, and just plain excitement in the works of comic artists as diverse as Phillippe Druillet, M. W. Kaluta, Moebius, Berni Wrightson, Jim Steranko, or Victor Moscoso then in all the idiocy of recent art movements, where artists have shot themselves, packaged their manure in cans, or have simply slavishly copied photos—done anything, that is, but create imaginative works of art. Such things require discipline, craft, skill—it's been much easier for too many modern artists to package themselves *and let their art shrivel (Enough. Once on my high-horse, I find it difficult to climb down again!)*



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DON McGREGOR RIDES SHOTGUN

In 1976, I was not feeling lucky.

The doctor who had been probing into my abdominal area stopped his probing

He frowned.

Most people do not like doctors to poke blunt fingers into their midsections. Most people like it even less when the doctors stop and frown. It makes them feel insecure.

If you are not feeling lucky, if you are in fact somewhat suspicious that the dice of life may have cooled for you, that your running streak is over, you can become downright paranoid when a doctor scowls, probes some more and scowls again.

"What is it?" I asked the question patients hate to ask.

He poked my stomach again. "Well, maybe it's nothing."

"Maybe what's nothing?" I asked, quickly, very quick on the uptake that doctor's "nothings" mean they are thinking about "something."

"Do you drink a lot?" he questioned

I grinned nervously. "No, see, I asked the question, but you didn't answer."

The doctor didn't grin. He stopped scowling at my stomach, delivered his scowl to my face.

"That's cute. Now, do you drink a lot?" His voice had a scowl on it, too.

"What do you mean? Coke? Coffee? A little bit of orange juice in the morning?" As I jabbered those words, there was a frightened part of me that did not want to know what his scowl portended, why he was asking me this question. It was related to the part of me that knew I was without any noticeable work at the moment, that this was a welfare clinic, that I had no money and beyond that, no medical coverage. The fear was that I was about to be catapulted into the big time, the high stakes, the life or death gamble. I had written a few old comic books. That and 25¢ would get me a cup of coffee (remember this is 1976), and maybe a free pass to some comic conventions.

The doctor said, his voice filled with the awareness of the other patients lined up behind us to see him, "No, not coke or orange juice. Booze. Do you booze it up a lot?"

"Uhh . . .no," I answered cautiously, trying not to wonder where this was all leading. "Is there . . .is something wrong?"

He shook his head, and answered by prodding around my stomach area again, or at least the area where I thought my stomach was. It had been a long time since I last looked at a Visible Woman doll.

"You have an enlarged spleen," he said, quietly.

A warning siren screamed in my head. Spleen, it said. Spleen! Another part of my brain asked what the hell a spleen was? What did it do? And why panic when you don't even know what a spleen looks like? Another part argued, It's a part of us, isn't it? Anything that goes wrong with a part of us is reason for concern!

"I do?" I said, suddenly aware of my every breath. "Does that mean there's something wrong with me?"

He turned away from me, mumbling. "Well, in some cases it's a symptom of leukemia."

The warning sirens panicked, a mortal fear screeching into my heart, bowels and hands. If my hair was ever going to stand on end, this was going to me the time.

Leukemia. One of the scare words of our age. Like cancer. Like mental illness. As scary as the words "bubonic plague" once were. They are not words to hear when you are not feeling lucky.

I was breathing hard, as if I had been running. I tried to take it calmly while the screaming went on inside me, while the doctor scribbled illegibly on a medical pad, while he handed me the undecipherable sheet.

"This is Friday," he said, as the other patients in the line fidgeted and he prepared to give them his attention. "It's too late for you to go to Queens Hospital today, and our people aren't on until Monday. I want you to go down there Monday and have them check you over." He was very matter-of-fact. "I wouldn't worry until you see them."

I walked out into a Queens Friday morning. I looked at the sheet of paper. I could not read it, but it seemed to sentence me to a death row call for the weekend, forced to wait for either the chair or the last minute reprieve.

I can't tell anyone about this, I thought.

I've got to tell someone, I contradicted myself. If I don't tell someone about this I am going to go right out of my mind by the time Monday comes around! I've got to tell someone, someone who will listen and understand, tell them, "Please understand, I am scared, I am 'don't dare to be alone' scared.

I walked the sidewalks and talked to God. I thought about all those St. Peter and the pearly, cloudy gates of heavens jokes. I imagined a list, where someone standing on clouds unrolled a scroll and checked the names inscribed on its rolls and said, "Get this one! And this one!" And I wanted to scream, not only in my mind, but out loud, to those guys with that list in the clouds, "Why me?" The question we all ask. "I mean I know I have my faults! I understand that! I'd like to be better! There are sure goddamn times when I should have been better!"

If I had been on the sidewalks of Manhattan, rather than Queens, I would have screamed. Screaming is a matter of course in Manhattan. People understand or ignore the screams there. In Queens, all they know is that a screamer is a fruitcake.

I had been through a year of family courts concerning visitation rights, a divorce, and a less than amiable separation with Marvel Comics. It was as if everything bad that could happen was happening, all at once.

I was not feeling lucky.

The doctor said not to worry until I knew for sure. But on that Friday, walking alone through the crowded sidewalks of Queens, I would not have bet on myself, if the odds were 98 to 1 in my favor. It is not a good way to feel. It was going to be a long weekend.

I wondered if I could make a deal with St. Peter, perhaps request a review of my case history, admit all of the terrible things I had done or thought, finally recognize them out loud, and then plead for clemency from the court.

I couldn't locate the court, so I called

John Warner and told him I was coming in to the city. I told him I needed company He said, "Come on in."

It was a long weekend, a longer Monday morning, until I was ushered into the examination room, and two doctors studied the scrawl on the piece of paper, taped around my stomach, quipped wise to each other in best M*A*S*H* fashion, and then like Heckle and Jeckle, said in unison, "This doctor up there must be hysterical, kid! Don't worry about it! I mean look at this handwriting."

"I can't read it," I told them

"You don't have to," they said, smiling, arms around each other, good buddies telling the patient the good news. "Just look at the exaggerated highpoints of the lettering, and those dramatic lows! The guy's an obvious hysteric. Go on home and forget about it!"

I wanted to go back to the clinic and kill the son of a bitch for scaring me like that

Anyhow, as Bill Cosby used to say, "I told you that story to tell you this."

A bit later in the year, after my phone had been taken off the wall in my Queens apartment by a phone operator who knocked on the door while I was in the bathtub reading the Richard Anobile Film Classic Library book of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (not the best place to read that book or hear a sudden rap-rap-rapping at your door); after Con Edison turned off the lights the day before I moved to Manhattan, down in the Bowery area of the East Side; after I was half-way through the rewrite for *The Variable Syndrome*, I went into Bellevue hospital with pains that tore up my stomach, through my chest, up into my throat, down my left arm, right into my fingers.

When you have that kind of pain you do not think much about luck, good or bad You kneel on the hospital floor.

I told Janie, who had brought me to Bellevue, that I was kind of tired and asked her why she didn't go on I thought I'd take a rest. It hurt so much I could barely speak the words. It was really interfering with my stiff upper lip.

I was in the hospital for three weeks, undergoing examinations and other indignities as well as some absolutely bizarre happenings. Remind me to tell you sometime of the Chayefski-like happenings at Bellevue, which included patients being confused with other patients and being sent for the wrong treatments. Or about the porn movie being shown on Friday night in the rec room for the elderly patients. Or about the night before Lannie Wolfe (who was in the bed beside me) was due to go in for open heart surgery. Send a letter to Mark Gasper. He'll remind me. Some other time we'll go into it.

Anyhow, before the pain took over my life and incapacitated it, I was struggling through a rewrite of *The Variable Syndrome*. "What is a Variable Syndrome?" you might well ask. Good question.

Originally, *The Variable Syndrome* was a 31 page short story about psychokinetic serpents, time travel, and a man and woman who had once been important to each other and had lost that importance. Sometime in the early 70's it was transformed into a comic story for Warren Magazines Complications arose, even though Uncle Creepy had been given introductory lines to say about the story: "That's another tale that will have to wait for another time.

In 1976, when Dave Kraft, the publisher/editor of Fictioneer Books suggested printing the original *Dragonflame* book, I intended to include that 31 page story in the collection of short stories. The *Dragonflame* book grew in size, as most projects have a wont to do I had added a new story, *The Play It Again Sam Casablanca Blues* to the collection. It was a love story from a male point of view, as was an older story, *The Real World Is Outside Waiting* Since the men in these two stories subjectively interpreted the personalities, actions and motives of different women who were a part of their lives, I felt the book as a whole had become unbalanced. I felt that people could justifiably criticize the book by asking why there had not been a story where a woman was the central character and tried to understand the mysteries of the people they were with I decided to redo *The Variable Syndrome*. I would concentrate on Elena Halloran, rather than her husband, Scott.

Now, at this point in time, I still intended for *The Variable Syndrome* to be a short story. When I started to rewrite it, it was with every intention that it would remain a short story. We were way overdue with the book. The rest of the stories had been typeset and corrected, and here I was embarking on a whole new addition to the book. And of course, while all this work was being done there were no vast amounts of sheckles coming in to change my status of living.

By the time I went onto my hands and knees on the hospital linoleum, I still intended that *The Variable Syndrome* would be a short story. Yet, the story had already grown to 50 plus pages, and I was not even halfway through. This increase in length came about without adding a single scene! I had only tried to further develop the characters, most specifically Elena I hoped to give her greater depth and more sensitivity. I hoped to more throughly explore the ideas of the story

It was beginning to dawn on me (even though I was fighting the thought) that *The Variable Syndrome* was no longer going to be a short story. While I was fighting the thought, I ended up in the hospital. I had been having difficulty writing a sequence where the tough talking, yet humane Elena was seductively approached by a secret agent named Caramante. I finally broke the scene while sitting on a hospital bed, feverishly typing on a portable machine on top of a food tray.

While I was in the hospital the beginning of *The Variable Syndrome* was typeset. What that means of course, is that nothing from the beginning of the story could be changed or substituted without enormous cost, even though I finally conceded that it was no longer a short story. At any rate, *The Variable Syndrome* was still meant to be part of the *Dragonflame* book.

Until it ran over a hundred pages in length.

After that happened, Dave and I were faced with a problem. Of course, I finished *The Variable Syndrome* after I had been released from the hospital. As I finished pages, they were sent out to the typesetters.

At that time, Colin Campbell, one of the biggest comics dealers in Great Britain, was visiting New York. One afternoon, while he was talking to Dave and I, in Dave's West Side apartment, he suggested that we publish *The Variable Syndrome* in a second book. We discussed this, and decided to go with it.

Now, that project went through as many different formats as the beginning of *The Variable Syndrome*. I am not going to repeat them all here. It does give you some indication of how many versions were contemplated when you realize that the book was completed in June 1977 and has finally became a real book, with a beautiful color cover by Walt Simonson only recently To be honest, I had given up hope that the book would ever be done. Then, this past Christmas, Dave sent me a package by UPS. The package was wrapped in bright Christmas paper It contained copies of *The Variable Syndrome*. I stared at them, unbelieving I had not even seen Walt's painting. I was like a kid. I did not feel unlucky any more. I felt the thrill, the excitement, and I smiled like an idiot, and held onto the book, and—God!—it felt like a real book!

Dave will hate to hear this, all publishers and editors understandably hate to hear this kind of thing, but I wish my part of the project were better. Oh, I love the package. It's printed on beautiful paper. I love Walt's cover. But I guess there are always things that I would redo Especially if I'd known that *The Variable Syndrome* was, more or less, going to be a story standing on its own. I might have changed the beginning somewhat. I probably would have changed the ending. On the other hand, I am also proud of the book. I like its efforts to link eroticism and romance and I like many of the concepts that the story explores. I like Elena, even though some folks may have a bit of difficulty with her salty language and explicit sexuality.

Immediately following is one section from *The Variable Syndrome*. Even though it begins some 20 pages into the story, I think you will be able to pick up the thread of what is going on.

I had not contemplated doing too many articles for the *Riding Shotgun* series that would deal with the release of books I was

doing. Yet with a prose book that is primarily being offered to a graphic audience, I thought it might be advisable to give the book some exposure, to give the prospective audience some idea of what to expect. To be honest, I'd love to do more prose books, and if *The Variable Syndrome* sells well enough, obviously I'll get the chance to try again. And hopefully improve my act each time.

I hope you enjoy it. If you do, and if you're interested in finding out how it all turns out for Elena and Scott, as well as the others, the guys and girls at Fictioneer Books will happily accept orders. Actually, for all I know, they may have koala bears filling the orders, but they will mail copies of the book to you if you make out a check to: FICTIONEER BOOKS, LTD., 12 Screamer Mountain Drive, Clayton, Georgia 30525.

The first edition has a limited print-run, so be the first on your block to have your very own *Variable Syndrome* book. You'll be the center of attention, and perhaps the vice squad.

If you order this book, and are on the food stamp program, Ronald Reagan may send you a personally monogramed jelly bean. If you order this book, Screamer Mountain may stop screaming. Oh, they won't stop screaming if I don't tell you how much to make the checks out for, will they? The books are $10.00, plus $1.00 postage. Those are inflationary dollars. Anyone who has questions about this will be expected to watch President Reagan's show-and-tell exhibition on inflationary dollars which was aired this past January.

But please—PLEASE!—don't send one to the White House. We do not want to make Mrs. Reagan blush.

Thank you.

VARIABLE SYNDROME

The mourners were serpents.

There were three of them, all yellow in hue, all huge and sinuous, all swaying in unison over the corpse of the creature Caramante had slain.

The collection of windows looked onto death. They seemed to seek the missing chunks of lemon scales, as if they reasoned that the remains had to be somewhere. But the remains were nowhere to be found, despite their intense scrutiny. The bloodstains had dried to scabrous, dark purple puddles about the decaying body.

Caramante had found a flat ledge positioned above the serpents, where they could not be seen if they kept close to the surface. Caramante stared into his binoculars, though they could all see the creatures plainly by eye.

The serpents sang without mouths, but it was less a keening wail now, less a protest of anguish, and more a dirge of incomprehension as to how such events could be, a humming that seemed to suggest a tragic desire to somehow return events to the way they had been before the intrusion of death.

"What the hell do you make out of all of that?" Caramante whispered.

"Intelligence," Halloran said, his eyes scarred with death.

"You mean like animals? Dogs? Monkeys? That the kind of intelligence you're referring to?" Caramante kept his voice low, but hard. *Nice trick*, Elena thought, and wondered if they gave classes in espionage training schools on how to achieve authority even while whispering.

"No, no, I don't think so," Halloran answered, carefully, trying to ignore the bleeding sound. The serpent in the center stiffened; its coils went taut and hard. A pure note—distilled agony issued from a living trumpet—caught in the air and remained for an impossibly long time. "This race of . . .whatever they are . . .displays too much ritual, too much concentrated response to be equated with the animal behaviorisms you mentioned, Caramante." He was lying near the edge of the plateau, to the right of Caramante, and he lowered his head onto his arms. He said it softly, as if by mutual unspoken concurrence they had decided to converse in whispers; but despite the softness there was emotion in Scott's tone, a kindred emotion in response to the music claiming the air. "They're amazing, aren't they? I mean, listen to them. A jazz trumpeteer'd give his life to catch that sound with his horn, to produce it from his lips. And those serpents, they don't have any mouths, never mind lips. So how do they do it, how do they articulate their grief so deeply?"

The side of the ravine Elena and the rest had climbed had brought them to the level expanse of the plateau. The flat surface offered a panorama of the mountainous terrain below. On either end of the broad plateau sheer walls of stone angled upward steeply

Elena crouched against the rock wall at right, and Gavin knelt nearby. He sucked air noisily between his teeth. Impatiently. Irritably.

What's the matter? Elena wanted to

ask. *Has all this hiking and exercise and emotional barrage aggravated that constipated condition, dear old reliable Professor? Hmm? Poor dear*

Greenliegh breathed loudly through stuffed sinuses, almost sniffling, choking back the mucus.

The middle serpent became more rigid, screeched now, while the other two were soft in the background. The sound seemed to stir something strange behind Elena's eyes. She was aware that something inside her was inspired by and in sympathy with the haunting melancholy of the serpent's mourning. The concept flitted at the edges of her awareness, an idea she could almost grasp.

She sensed a past. A nebulous past One she could not quite fathom. Yet there was an impression of history conveyed in the slicing tone, and while it cleaved her mind like a knife stroke, the sound also held steady, continued holding, holding, a concept that played tantalizingly just on the edge of her awareness, threatening to reveal itself, its meaning

Or perhaps it wasn't a threat.

Perhaps it was a promise.

A vanished promise.

An unfulfilled promise.

Elena sat, watching Scott and Caramante and the serpent who was seemingly turned to stone, and while the sound ripped at her mind and hovered on the brink of tantalizing revelations, her memory swept back to the 1980's, when she was still a teenager and the world was still a *Cosmopolitan* world and a *True Confessions* planet.

She shook her head, sadly bemused.

All that *Cosmopolitan* crap Jesus, it was no wonder women grew into adulthood with as many fucked-up perspectives as men. How could they turn our otherwise, after reading all those articles on "How to be Wanted" or "How to be Alluring," or "Daring," or "Plastically Phony," or add your own favorite desperately-inspired-to noun. Supplement that monthly diet with the redemption flavor of confessional "romance" (there's a prime example of butchering the meaning of a word) magazines, juicier than ever with their lurid dimensional stills, and the fuck-up process was nigh unto complete. She could still recall one spicy little feature: "I Paid For the Deadliest Sex Crime Of All " She had been thirteen at the time when, thanks to that article, she had discovered what the deadliest sex crime was. The story claimed it was fellatio, and proved the point by having the heroine die of throat cancer for performing such an act. The heroine, typically for this confessional plot formula is forced into such "perverse" behavior. (The word "perverse" is never used, but "deadliest" is one helluva substitute, and even an illiterate can get the implication) In the 1990's when her own first professional dimensional stills appeared, and she had the chance to meet with media heads—editors and publishers, people of that ilk—she had heard all their justifications for such travesties. "The girls know these're fantasies. They're entertainment stories, that's all!" *They are not fantasies*, she thought, now. *They are dark corruptions of the spirit, and they kill the word fantasy as thoroughly as they kill the word romance*

The long note ceased

The serpent crumpled, fold after fold, and fell across the corpse.

The mourners beside it continued a low dirge, sluggish and heavy, without relief.

Elena hated pain. She wanted to tell the serpents how much she hated pain and loss. Boy, did she ever hate pain. She recalled the first time she had had an IUD placed inside her, having to pay the doctor two hundred dollars for the pleasure of having him thrust the little do-hickey into place.

Nothing erotic about that Scott

She resented the *Cosmopolitan* mechanics, and the *Penthouse* performance levels. She liked conjuring fantasies, and she felt she was often quite good at it, and she did not understand women who repressed their sexuality, but she also resented the mechanical nature of media manipulators in their repression of sex, and wondered when they would realize that touching and warmth and caring were an integral part of it all. A caring look. A caring touch. Each a part of the whole, without which the others would inevitably wither and die.

She wanted to tell that to Scott

Gavin crawled over to Scott. It was an act at which he was not very graceful.

"Halloran, we are not equipped to continue this venture at this time," he said, his voice full and rich, accustomed to public address. He did not resort to whispering. "You must recognize that fact, Halloran. I give you credit for that much cognizance. A return expedition will be in order, without a doubt, to define the peculiarities we have encountered, and also to determine the further worth of future (if you will pardon the expression) expeditions. But this is a dangerous environment, and we are not prepared for such extremes. For the sake of all, including your wife, I make a proposal that we return immediately to the Chronology Conveyor and to Fort Ticonderoga and file our reports."

"Don't use me as a cover for your own fears," Elena said, softly, the undulation of the serpent's emotion keeping her own voice melancholy

"Forgive me," Gavin answered, mockingly. "I meant no condescension to your gender, Mrs. Halloran "

"I suppose you mean I'm an able woman, is that it, Professor Gavin?" she asked, but could not summon up the appropriate hostility, and saw such hostility, strangely, as counter-productive.

She could only sense Gavin's hollow years.

"Come now, Mrs. Halloran, this is neither the time nor the place for you specious semantics." Gavin said, standing. "I've given your husband his head wherever I could, but I will not do so any longer. I have made my reasons clear, and I stand by them."

Something's different, Elena thought.

Gavin began to walk toward the rear of the plateau.

"Professor Gavin," Halloran called after him, a whispered shout.

There's something missing, Elena thought.

"I won't argue any longer, Halloran." Gavin spun about, pointing at Scott "It's over! Do you understand? Over! Finished!"

Something is .

"I mean it. There is no room for debate. We return immediately "

. . .missing . . .

"You can organize the others, if you please."

. . .but what?

"Thank you." Gavin said, distainfully, with full Congressional measure.

The music!

The serpents have stopped!

She looked toward the plateau edge, and saw that Scott was still oblivious to the absence, but that Caramante was already turning back to survey the creatures.

She still felt their sorrow, but now something stronger emanated from them.

What?

Fear!

It was a palpable, unreasoning fear, and it was everywhere. Two windows swept about like mobile scanners. The center serpent did not rise from the corpse that its long length caressed.

Gavin stopped at the rear edge of the plateau, as he was about to lower himself into the ravine. "Did you hear what I said, Mr. Halloran? I hope I won't have to repeat myself."

The two windows stopped, stayed on the same view, framed the same scene.

The ledge.

Gavin!

Elena saw color sparking within the windows. Color that was not just color—but more like the color energy itself might have, if indeed it had color. It was a brief burst of magenta. Sizzling! Radiant! Beautifully frightening! She reached for her Tri Scanner. Could she capture its hue? Its power?

Jagged rock slabs tore from their foundations, trailing small rock remains that clattered back to their parent surface.

Gavin stopped, hearing the unlikely sound of rending rock, and his analytical mind tried desperately to comprehend what had happened. The first severed rock formation cleared the ledge.

Oh lord! Elena thought

The projectile gained speed, began to blur.

Gavin saw it approaching, tried to understand what it was and how it could be happening. The knowledge of what it could do came into his blue eyes He took panicked flight, staring over his shoulder at the levitated missle as it rose through

the sky. A second boulder appeared over the lip of the ledge.

"Ga—" she started.

The first boulder halted in mid-flight and plummeted!

"—vin!" she finished, as it hit his shoulders and threw him skittering onto the dusty rock surface.

It was like a magician's trick. Gavin's right arm disappeared under the weight of rock, crushed, all the bones turned to splinters, all the veins torn asunder. Gone, with one descent of the rock, like one sweep of the conjurer's cloak. Gone! But, unlike a magic trick, there wasn't a prestidigitator to complete the effect, and conjure the arm back, whole and working.

Halloran began to rise, but Caramante leapt at him, caught him by the waist, and brought him back down. Scott's hands clenched into fists, as if he could not subdue his response to this latest abuse. Caramante backhanded him with a short vicious arc of the arm. His knuckles ripped Halloran's lower lip open. Halloran's teeth gouged the insides of his mouth, and his head banged against the rock. Halloran felt his lip swell out of shape.

He's dead, Elena thought. *He can't be, but he is, and all the psychological subterfuges, and all the sinister subtleties have changed*

His death has made it all real.

She heard Greenliegh making involuntary whimpering sounds. His hands were clawing at the rock wall, as if he could not stand without assistance, and she heard the whimper become a stronger noise. She knew he was going to shout, either an idiotic "Help!" or a protesting "NO!"

And she knew the serpents would track the sound.

Elena grappled with him and caught her hands about his throat. He was crying, and it streaked the dust on his cheeks, but his fright overrode his sorrow and horror.

She felt the shout trembling in his throat as she squeezed fiercely; her unpolished nails tore at the flesh, trying to strangle the shout, and she knew he could get himself killed. Could, perhaps get them all killed.

"Don't!" she hissed, and let the single word say everything.

He grabbed her wrists, trying to pry her loose! She tightened her fingers around his throat. He gagged.

"Don't do it, Greenliegh—don't scream, or shout, or rant, or say anything aloud! There aren't any words that will change what has happened! They'll hear it," she whispered, "if you scream, they'll know Gavin was not alone!"

She felt her grip beginning to slip on his sweat and tears

If he yanked his head backward with one decisive thrust, she would lose her hold. And then, if he stood and began to run, the way Gavin had run, there would be more energy the color of magenta and more natural mountain shape lifting, levitating, and seeking a target.

Greenliegh lost his adrenalin, wilted.

She let him rest on his side, put a finger to his lips.

His terrified eyes understood.

Elena turned to the source of danger

Two windows were searching

For what?

Movement?

Were the windows listening?

Did windows have ears?

If so, how acute was their hearing?

She noticed that the windows differed in size. One was smaller, not nearly as rectangular. In fact (odd how the mind worked), she could see that the lemon shades also varied, some mottled like ripening fruit.

Halloran crawled across the ledge, and Caramante grabbed for him, but Halloran was beyond his grasp. Caramante considered for a moment, then decided it was not worth the effort *and placed his binoculars back to his eyes,* as if to seek some minute detail that would somehow get them all out of this.

Halloran reached Elena's side, stared hard at her.

Yes? she wanted to ask, but didn't

He frowned, moved over to Greenliegh,

and tenderly patted the youth's hair.

There's no doubt about it. The windows are listening, Elena thought. Like sentries, the serpents stood their ground. All the white, the center serpent paid them no heed, remained draped over the form of its dead likeness.

Elena looked back at Scott and Greenliegh.

The terror had gone out of Greenliegh's eyes

Scott gripped Greenliegh s shoulder, squeezed, and then returned to her side.

Making the rounds? She wondered

She saw that Caramante had the demoleculizer right at his side, within easy reach

The sentries probed suspiciously.

Scott placed his hand deliberately on the inside of her leg, at the knee. The touch felt intimate.

He looked into her eyes, and his gaze was asking the same question it had asked earlier. She put an arm around him, held his head to her breast, which was an easier gesture than having to return his look.

Maybe I have forgotten how to care, she thought, afraid and alone, as she held his head and stroked his hair. *Or maybe it's just that I don't know how to ignore everything that has gone before—the touching times, or the rejecton times*

She looked beyond his hair.

The sentries were relaxing.

Safe, she thought.

For now.

They were still out there, two serpent sentinels and one mourner. The two erect creatures waited, their lower ends curling lazily; one wrapped a tail languidly about its middle section. Eventually, the sentry windows descended toward the mourner, stopped just before they reached its weeping form, and hovered as if waiting out the emotion.

They did not touch, but the mourner reacted as if they had and slowly disengaged its length from the corpse.

Perhaps the serpents are going to leave, Elena thought. Once the creatures were gone, they could return to the Conveyor.

A few more moments of quiet followed.

Then the serpents turned, sinuously, and began to move, muscles swelling and bunching at their midsections, as they travelled over the uneven, mountainous surface.

Gavin groaned.

He thrashed with his good hand at the rock that held him helpless, clenched the hand into a fist and hammered at the boulder, while he whimpered and the flesh ripped from his knuckles, stripped from the side of his fist. He saw the blood. He saw it and stared at it, still not comprehending. There was a great deal of the liquid, and it spread like an incriminating stain on white cotton. He looked as if he might deny the blood or what it could portend, and then the realization came brutally into his eyes, the knowledge seemed to brighten their color. He screamed the knowledge, wordlessly articulate.

The serpents stopped, swirled. Energy crackled, and suddenly there were three, four rocks, all lifting simultaneously.

"Jesus we've had it!" Caramante yelled, gripping the demoleculizer and leveling it at the trio.

He pulled the trigger as the first boulder sailed overhead, seemed to zero in on Gavin, and dropped.

Gavin screamed, a shriek that tore at the heart and made Elena realize that she

had only *thought* she knew what a scream was. There was nothing theatrical about this scream, nothing self-conscious, and it held nothing in common with the voice normally associated with Professor Kenneth Gavin.

He did not live to finish the scream.

The missile hit him, crushed the back of his head to pulp, and the shriek was abruptly silenced. Teeth, tongue, bone, vocal chords—all were obliterated. But although the scream was never completed, it made its statement, told of terror at human frailty, said without words that it was utterly unfair that this inanimate projectile could put an end to all the convoluted thought patterns.

"This is it, Halloran! Go for broke time!" Caramante shouted, harshly. But he did not look toward Halloran; he was concentrating on the demoleculizer sight, instead, adjusting, coming down ever so slightly, gauging for wind velocity and distance. "Get your ass in gear and get back to that ravine, and take April Sunshine With The Dark Hair with you. And the kid, too! You get yourselves back to the Conveyor, and you don't move from there once you do, got that?"

Scott came to his feet and offered Elena his hand, to help her up. He grasped at her at the elbow.

"Got that?" Caramante demanded, louder, firing at the same time, as the smell of burnt marshmallows rose briefly in the air.

"Yes," Scott answered, pulling Elena upward, and he held onto her arm for several seconds after she was standing.

Elena did not look at him. She reached for her Tri-Scanner and the world splintered.

Sizzling/searing/screaming/ scorching/scathing/the air ablaze/the mountains tortured/the tumult obliterating everything.

It banished the melancholy.

Elena twisted loose from Scott, unsnapped the Tri-Scanner case, and wondered what was happening.

Scott watched her as if she were crazy. "Elena, what in the hell are you doing? Have you lost your...are you out of your...Elena?"he yelled, blood rushing into his face as he reached for her again. "Not now! This isn't the time for your . your damned pic..."

She evaded his grasp.

"Now is the only time, damn it; what the hell do you know? I'm not staying here to get us all killed, don't make me out the fanatic woman careerist who can't see anything else! Jesus, I deserve better than that." She brought the focus triangle to play—depth, length, width, all calculated—as she shouted over the noise of weaponry and screaming, alien screaming. Something was sliced out there, something yellow that yielded to the green beam of the demoleculizer. "We're going back to 1994, Scott, and a highly-respected Government man is dead, crushed, and there are going to be lots of questions asked about that death, enough to fill maybe the rest of our lives! You know those institutions, Scott—good God, you've been before their thrones of judgment enough times, you should know how they act. They have a singular intensity, but they all reflect their unseen superiors. They've left the human condition behind. You've had to kow-tow to them before. There have been plenty of times that you've had to placate them. Damn it, Scott, in one way or another they've already taken over your life.. before we even left! God knows—even I know, if you don't—that 1994 was *never* your time!"

Elena, what are you talking about?" he asked, afraid, as if he already knew.

"*This* isn't your time, either, Scott. Wherever we've arrived, you still haven't found a time. Me, either, I guess."

She hit the shutter, hands steady.

Once: Caramante in the act of firing a second beam, green contacting viciously with the yellow, the creature bending in supple protest, body curve erased into nothingness while vivid purple splashed into the morning air.

Twice: the blood still sprayed against the vivid blue, just beginning to fall, showering, as gravity made its claim. The other creatures reacting, and the heat from the demoleculizer rippling the air.

Thrice: the creature's length going limp, twisting about itself, toppling, the window angling crazily as it battered against the rising slope of copperish stone.

Scott was at her arm again.

"Yes, now!" she said, and there was still

Con't pg. 78

I received a phone call from an editor at Marvel Comics. "We have a problem," he said. "It's about the contract..."

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The head of the creature terrified her. It did not have a snake's dark, hard eyes. It did not have a forked tongue stabbing at the air. The flesh split in a maddening biological architecture, forming a perfect square, like a window frame made of living tissue.

Scott Halloran stumbled backward, involuntarily, mouth open.

What in the hell is this? he asked himself. This creature cannot exist here in Detroit—not at any time. Can it?

The demoleculizer beam sliced, at the creature's neck, and something spilled into the air. The liquid that splashed out of its throat was thick, like oil.

Elena saw color sparking within the window-head. She reached for her Tri-Scanner. Could she capture its hue? Its power? It was a brief burst of magenta. Sizzling! Radiant! Beautifully frightening!

Suddenly, jagged rock slabs tore free from a nearby ridge.

The rocks lifted.

They simply rose into the air!

Elena said, "Holy shit!"

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MARVEL COMICS

VESS STRIP BOUGHT BY EPIC

Children of the Stars, the ntasy comic strip which was ing serialized in *The Comic nes/Media Showcase* has been ught by Archie Goodwin for *ie Illustrated*. The approxima- ly 50 page black and white ory has been substantially re- itten and redrawn and will ap- ar as a regular serial begin- ng with issue 8.

In addition to *Children of e, Epic 8* will contain the fol- wing color stories: "A Little ve, A Little Hate" by Arthur ydam, "Dreams End" -- Chapter of Jim Starlin's *Metamorphois ssey* series, "Shiny Beast" by ck Veitch, "Maker" by Mark eatley, "Ankhesenamun" by Tri- Robbins and "Punk Zone" by nny Daley and Mike Saenz.

Tim Conrad has contributed a ack and white story entitled ontact" and the cover painting r this issue is by Howard Cha- in.

The final two chapters of *Me- morphosis Odyssey* will appear *Epic 9* and there is no new arlin series planned after s conclusion. Vess' *Children the Stars* and the new *Weird rld* story ("Dragon Masters of arn") by Doug Moench and John scema will fill the vacated ace. According to Goodwin, e magazine will soon be rely- g on more continuing series ther than short, anthology ories.

Upcoming *Epic* projects in- ude a black and white story out Robert E. Howard by Roy omas and Sandy Plunkett, a ew personable barbarian char- ter" by Roger Stern which will obably be drawn by Alex Toth, long black and white story itten and drawn by Frank Mil- r which will be serialized, other Bob Aull story and an- her story by Trina Robbins. ture cover artists include m Conrad and Joe Jusko.

MORE REPRINTS CANCELLED

Continuing the gradual reduction of the Marvel reprint line, both the *Sgt. Fury* and *Marvel Super Heroes* titles are being cancelled.

Sgt Fury 167 will be the last issue of one of Marvel's longest running titles. Originally concieved as Marvel's "realistic approach" to war by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1963, the series spotlighted a number of characters who made a successful transition from a World War II setting to become characters in the "modern day" Marvel universe as members of Shield. Lee and Kirby soon left the strip and a number of writers and artists worked on the series throughout the 60's. In the early 70's, sagging sales forced the book to its present reprint status. As a tribute to Lee and Kirby, *Sgt. Fury* 167 will "re-present" the pair's premiere Howling Commando story which appeared in *Sgt. Fury* 1.

The last issue of *Marvel Super Heroes* (which has been reprinting issues of *The Incredible Hulk*) will be no. 105.

DENNIS THE MENACE AT MARVEL

After months of negotiation Marvel Comics has signed to produce 18 *Dennis the Menace* comic books a year. Twelve of the books will contain new material written Fred Tool and drawn by the Hank Ketcham studio. They will be packaged as regular 50¢ Marvel comics.

The other six comics will feature reprints of older material. The format for the *Dennis the Menace* reprints has not yet been decided.

According to editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, Marvel decided to pick up the famous strip because of its strong appeal overseas and the possibility of it being a good vehicle for Marvel's recently acquired animation studio. Shooter commented that,"In many ways *Dennis* is a more saleable and viable commodity for our film studio than *Spider-Man* or some of our characters."

MARVEL EXPLORES MINI-SERIES

With the cancellation of both of Marvel's "showcase" titles, *Marvel Premiere* and *Marvel Spotlight*, it is likely that future series experiments will be presented in the three mini-series format that DC has employed so effectively over the past two years. One possible marketing technique being discussed is to release these special projects to the direct sale distribution outlets only, although no final decision has been reached.

Hawkeye (written by Mark Gruenwald) and a Scarlet Witch/Vision series (probably written by Bill Mantlo) are among the mini-series proposals currently under consideration. The scarlet Witch/Vision series according to Jim Shooter would probably focus on the "denouement" of the Celestial Madonna *Avengers* storyline.

BYRNE AND LEE SURFER ONE-SHOT

John Byrne and Stan Lee are collaborating on a one-shot, 48 page *Silver Surfer* comic book story. The story which will feature the Surfer's return to his home planet was co-plotted by the pair based upon Byrne's initial idea. Byrne will also pencil and ink the story.

Originally intended as a multi-part story in the regular *Fantastic Four*, comic, (which Byrne is writing and drawing), it is not certain at this time how the one-shot will be marketed once it is completed.

UPDATE: SPIDER-MAN CARTOON

Production has begun on the first episode of Marvel's *Spider-Man* cartoon show. Although the series has not yet been sold, Marvel is already planning a comic book adaptation of the first episode according to Jim Shooter. Regular Spider-Man editor Tom DeFalco will edit the project with Jim Salicrup and Dan Spiegel scripting and penciling. The book will also feature 4 or 5 pages of text features written by series producer Stan Lee.

MICRONAUTS: DIRECT SALES ONLY?

There is a possibility that *The Micronauts* will become Marvel's first regular book to be distributed solely through the direct sale outlets. The title has consistantly been one of Marvel's top-sellers to the specialty market and its newsstand sales have been "soft" according to Jim Shooter. The book has been rumored to be in danger of cancellation for quite some time and the direct sales experiment may be one way to keep the book from being cancelled.

At this writing, no final decision has been reached, although Shooter admitted that, "we're considering some more direct stuff." Shooter also mentioned that Marvel Specialty Sales Manager Mike Friedrich has been pushing for Marvel to try as many as four titles as all-direct sales books.

NOTES

Despite DC's price increase to 60c, Marvel has "at present no plans to increase the cover price", according to Jim Shooter... Gil Kane is the regular penciller and inker on *Conan the Barbarian*....Contrary to previous reports Larry Hama, not Denny O'Neil has written Marvel's adaptation of the new James Bond film, *For Your Eyes Only*. The adaptation was based upon the film's final screenplay and almost 800 stills from the movie itself. Marvel's adaptation will be in Hama's words, "as close to the final film as the screenplay was."...Luke McDonnell has pencilled a fill-in *Iron Man* story ....Armando Gil has inked Michael Golden's pencils on *Avengers Annual* 10 and will also be the regular on *Master of Kung Fu*....*Micronaughts* 35 which will explain the origin of the Microverse and guest star Dr. Strange, will be a double-sized issue. Val Mayerik has penciled this story....*Spectacular Spider-Man* 60, *Fantastic Four* 236 (celebrating Marvel Comics' 20th Anniversary), and *Rom* 25 will

also be double-sized issues.... Jim Sherman is penciling *X-Men* 151 and 152....After Denny O'Neil's last story appears in *Spider-Man* 226, the regular teams on the Spider-Man line will be: Roger Stern, John Romita Jr. and Jim Mooney on *Amazing Spider-Man*; Bill Mantlo, Ed Hannigan and Mooney on *Spectacular Spider-Man*; Marc DeMatteis, Herb Trimpe and Mike Esposito on *Marvel Team-Up*....*Bizarre Adventures* 28 will be a special Red Sonja issue featuring two tales written by Chris Claremont with art by John Bolton. Bolton who also contributed the issue's cover painting has redesigned the She-Devil's costume....*Starburst* has added 8 additional full color pages without a price increase beginning with issue 35. Premiering in that issue is *Tales From the Rim*, a new Paul Neary, science fiction, humor strip.... Galactus is scheduled to appear in *Dazzler* 10....Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandoes will be guest-starring in an upcoming issue of *Doctor Strange*....Gene Day is now the regular *Master of Kung Fu* penciler....*Marvel Super Action* will now feature *complete* reprints of past Avengers stories and a regular pinup gallery feature with new artwork... .John Buscema's Bront the Barba-

rian will alternate with Gil Kane's Chane of the Golden Hair as the backup feature in *The Savage Sword of Conan*....Reprints of the Captain Britain series by Chris Claremont and Herb Trimpe will be the new backup feature in *Marvel Tales*, beginning with issue 130. This is the first American publication of this series which began in Marvel's British comics in 1976....Jan Strnad has sold Marvel a *Spider-Man* script. There is a possibility that he will do some more writing for Marvel....Bill Sienkiewicz is both pencilling and inking *Moon Knight*....The Angel will appear in a forthcoming *Avengers* story. In another story Yellowjacket will become a criminal....Jim Shooter is now editing *The Dazzler*....Frank Miller is writing this years *Marvel Team-Up Annual* which teams Spider-man, Daredevil, Moon Knight, Power Man and Iron Fist against the Kingpin and the Purple Man.... The *Conan Annual* by J.M. DeMatteis and Gil Kane has been delayed until July....The Man-wolf guest stars in *The Spectacular Spider-Man Annual* 3. The story is written by David Anthony Kraft, drawn by Jim Sherman and Alan Weiss and inked by Jim Mooney....In addition to the Denny O'Neil, Frank Miller and Klaus Janson lead story which features the Punisher and Dr. Octopus, this year's *Spider-Man Annual* features a unique backup feature which attempts to answer the question, "How strong is Spider-Man in relationship to the rest of the Marvel Universe?" ....*Raiders of the Lost Arc* and *Dragon Slayer* will definitely not continue as regular Marvel series after the completion of the adaptation of each movie.... Jim Starlin has signed a formal Marvel contract to produce *Dreadstar*, Starlin's graphic album book which is related to his *Metamorphosis Odyssey* series in *Epic Illustrated*. Archie Goodwin will edit the graphic album....A proposed Marvel romance comic is currently in the developmental stages. Tom DeFalco has been assigned to submit a plot for the book which will not feature a continuing "lead" character, but instead will be composed of full-length and eight page anthology stories. This romance comic along with a proposed western comic would not be packaged as a regular Marvel comic, but would be adapted for the huge romance and western paperback market....Alan Weiss is pencilling *Avengers* 215 and 216 which guest stars The Silver Surfer...

.Upcoming guest stars in *Marvel Team-Up* include Devil Slayer, King Kull and Ka-Zar....John Byrne, Gil Kane and Bob Hall have each pencilled one issue of *Spectacular Spider-Man*....*What If* 30 will feature "What If Spider-Man's Clone Had Lived"....A project in the planning stages is *The Marvel Comics Style Guide*, a how-to-write-Marvel Comics book written by Jim Shooter intended as an introduction to writing for Marvel....Beginning with issue 78, *Crazy* will be giving away free subscriptions to readers who send in the best variations on old jokes. The first category will be "knock-knock" jokes....Coming in *Crazy* 79 is "Loony Labels", a special feature by Gary Hallgren of Air Pirates fame....Another project under consideration are full-color reprints of stories done for the Marvel black and white magazine line which would be released to the fan market. Two stories prominently mentioned for the proposed project are Star-Lord by Chris Claremont, John Byrne and Terry Austin (*Marvel Preview* 11) and Daughters of the Dragon by Claremont and Marshall Rogers (*The Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* 32 and 33).....

DC COMICS

DC PRICE HIKE TO 60¢

Effective with the October, 1981 releases (on sale in July), the standard, 32 page DC comic will cost 60c. To offset the 10% price increase, DC has alloted two more pages for editorial material. These two additional pages will be utilized at the discretion of the individual editors. Most issues will now contain one text page (usually a letter column) and four pages of advertisement. With the added pages, DC now carries 6 more pages of editorial material than Marvel.

Although Marvel has made no move to increase the cover price of its books, DC Publisher Jenette Kahn intimated that, "as the effects of inflation hit us all, the other comic companies will be raising their prices soon...."

The price increase will not affect the DC digests and DC's 48 page books.

COLAN TO PENCIL NEW WONDER WOMAN AND BATMAN

Gene Colan, who signed a three year contract with DC in March, is scheduled to become the regular penciler on the monthly *Wonder Woman* and *Batman* titles. He will take over *Batman* on a permanent basis with issue 343 and may also make occasional guest-penciler appearances in *Detective*. At this point *Batman* editor, Dick Giordano is still looking for

a regular inker for Colan's pencils. To help that search, he is allowing a number of people to ink single pages from one Colan-penciled *Batman* story.

Colan has also been assigned to pencil the revamped *Wonder Woman* title which is being scripted by Roy Thomas and inked by Romeo Tanghal. The "new" Wonder Woman, her new costume, and her new creative team will be previewed in a special 16 page insert in *DC Comics Presents* 41.

Next month, the "new look" debuts in *Wonder Woman* 288 with a special, full-length 27 page story.

WARLORD: FILL-IN ART TEAM,

Beginning with issue 52, Mike Grell will take a six month leave of absence from illustrating *Warlord*. Grell, who will continue as the writer and cover artist for the series, will use the time to work on an outside project. Filling in for Grell will be Mark Texiera (penciler) and Mike DeCarlo (inker).

Laurie Sutton will become the editor of *Warlord* with the same issue. *Warlord* is Sutton's first regular editorial assignment. One of her first moves, will be to introduce a new backup feature for the book: Dragon Sword by Paul Levitz and Tom Yeates.

With Sutton taking over *Warlord*, Ross Andru has been given enough free time to work on several new projects. Among those projects is an as-yet unspecified new title.

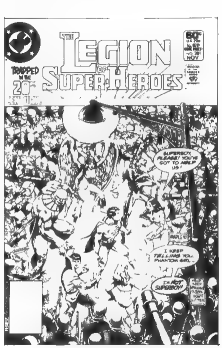
NEW EDITOR

Two Marvel emigrants, Gene Colan and Steve Gerber are the creative team that will produce the previously announced *Phantom Zone* mini-series. The series has been expanded into four parts to accomadate Gerber's script. The first issue of the series will be released in the fall.

DC COMICS PRESENTS
SUPERMAN AND
CLASSIC WAR
SUPER-HERO UPDATE: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO RICHARD TRACY, SUPER-CITY PROTECTOR?

MOEBUS TO HANDLE DC LICENSING

Mary Moebus has been hired to serve as DC's liason with the Licensing Corporation of America. In the newly created position, she will inherit some of the duties that were under the aegis of former DC President Sol Harrison. She will also be responsible for evolving new potential licensing approaches with the DC editors.



Ms. Moebus worked as the Assistant Director of Special Events at the Museum of Modern Art and as a publicist for the Thomas Y. Crowell publishing company.

UPCOMING: DC FUNNY ANIMAL COMIC

Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway have created a super-hero funny animal comic for DC editor Dick Giordano. The as-yet-untitled book is scheduled to debut as a regular 32 page monthly comic in June, 1982.

The strip will be previewed in a special 16 page insert in *Teen Titans* 16 on sale in May, 1982. Giordano will also edit this preview story.

NOTES

Joe Kubert was honored by the National Cartoonist Society with a Reuben Award in the comic book story category for his work on *Sgt. Rock*,....Paul Levitz is now scripting *The Legion of Super-Heroes*....Doctor Fate will begin as a backup feature in *Flash* 306. Written by Martin Pasko, the series is set in the present day and is not related to the character's appearances in *All Star Squadron*....Joe Staton is scheduled to ink several *Superman* stories, penciled by Curt Swan.. ..*Madame Xanadu* 1 is reported to have sold 100,000 copies....The lineup for the third DC-Marvel teamup tabloid book (scheduled for release in 1982) has been altered. It will now feature the *Teen Titans* and the *X-Men*, and not the *Legion of Super-Heroes* as was announced previously.... Captain Fear by David Michelinie and Walt Simonson will appear in three issues of *The Unknown Soldier*....Gerry Conway is the regular writer of *The World's Greatest Super-Heroes* strip. Some Conway-written dailies have been incorrectly credited to Paul Levitz....Marv Wolfman is leaving *Dial H For Hero*. The series will be alternately scripted by Bob Rozakis and E. Nelson Bridwell.

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INDEPENDENTS

Charlton Classics has been cancelled "due to poor sales." The last issue to appear will be issue 9. Replacing it on the schedule will be reprints of the *Fightin' Five*. The series will resume the original numbering of the title and issue 42 will reprint the origin story which appeared in 1964.

* * *

Continuity Publishing recently announced the imminent publication of its first two black and white portfolios. The first is by Esteban Maroto and the second is by Rick J. Bryant. Both portfolios will retail for "about $10.00" according to Continuity spokesperson Ellen Olbeys and will be printed on high quality stock. The Maroto portfolio will contain five prints by the artist and the Bryant portfolio will consist of six plates. A seventh illustration will be printed on the jacket of the Bryant portfolio.

Since both portfolios will be marketed worldwide through publisher Neal Adams' European connections, each portfolio will have an initial print run of 5,000. A second printing would depend upon the response of the market.

Other probable future Continuity projects include another Maroto portfolio and a portfolio by Adams himself.

* * *

Available in book form for the first time is the last Windsor McCay animated cartoon, *The Flying House*. The limited edition book (3,500 copies) contains 192 frames from the 10 minute, silent, fantasy cartoon which was originally shot in 16mm. in paperback reprints of popular underground strips is *More Adventures of Fat Freddy's Cat*. The 96 page book, which is the second paperback collection of the popular Gilbert Shelton strip is packaged in a new, horizontal format (5¾ X 8¾) and is priced at $4.95.

Also just released is *Rip off Comix* 8 and *Thunderdogs* by Hunt Emerson. In addition to a new Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers story by Gilbert Shelton, Dave Sheridan and Paul Mavrides ("Phineas Gets An Abortion"), *Rip-Off* 8 contains the first chapter of a four part Wonder Wart-Hog story "Battle of the Titans" by Shelton and Tony Bell and the first new Foolbert Sturgeon (Frank Stack) Jesus story in nearly a decade--"Jesus and the Bank Robbers." "Cartoonists of the World is a new regular 24 page section that has been added this issue. The feature "will spotlight some of the zaniest comic work from abroad by concentrating on a different country each issue," said Fred Todd, Rip Off Press President. Eight British artists are featured in this issue including Terry Gilliam, Hunt Emerson, and Lou Baxendale. Due to increased printing costs, *Rip Off* 8 carries a $1.50 cover price. To compensate for the price hike, the comic has added 16 pages.

Thunderdogs is a one man comic by Hunt Emerson featuring a 52

page adventure of Major Mongrel and his T-Dogs. The book retails for $1.50.

The Winter and Spring issues of *Sorceror's Apprentice*, will be combined to form a double issue. Among the features in this 80 page issue are a discussion with L. Sprague deCamp on the Heroic Barbarian, a new John the Balladeer tale by Manly Wade Wellman, a Dilvish the Deliver story by Roger Zelazny and regular features Arcane Graffiti, Weapons Shop and Know Your Foe. The special issue will retail for $3.50.

* * *

New for Look Mom Comics! is *Psycho* 1, the first issue of a quarterly publication. Included in this issue which salutes the Horror, Terror and Crime comics of the 50's are stories by Dan Clowes, Rick Altergott, Joe Kerswild, "Doctor Death" and Pete Friedrich. Two of the 9 strips included in *Psycho* 1 will continue as regular features: "Shock Subway Stories" by Friedrich and "Tales My Father Told Me" by Kerswild. The theme of *Psycho* 2 (due in the Summer) will be the 1950-60's Romance comics and will include parodies of the original comics and new romance stories. *Psycho* is an over-sized 32 page, B & W comic with a color cover that retails for $1.75.

PACIFIC COMICS

Pacific Comics announced that it will be publishing two bi-monthly color comics. The comics will be produced at the same Sparta, Illinois printing plant just as the Marvel, DC and other overground comics are.

The first title to appear (probably in early July) will be *Captain Victory and the Galactic Rangers* by Jack Kirby. The 32 page comic will contain a 25 page Captain Victory story and seven pages of special features. The full color covers will be printed on slick, 100 lb. stock (twice as thick as a regular comic). Longtime Kirby collaborator Mike Royer has inked and lettered the story. Steve Oliff is the book's colorist.

Captain Victory and his team of futuristic humans and aliens are in pursuit of a group of aliens who represent a "beehive society" which destroys inhabited planets by transforming the planet's structure into giant beehives to accomadate the society's needs. The entire population of the planet usually perishes in the process of this transformation. The series opens as the beehive society has arrived on Earth and focuses on Captain Victory's struggle to save the planet.

Captain Victory will be marketed through the direct-sale outlets only and will carry a print run of at least 50,000 copies. It will retail for $1.

Pacific is also planning to release a second bi-monthly title, *Starslayer* by Mike Grell in the same format. *Starslayer* is scheduled for an August release.

KITCHEN SINK

Just released from Kitchen Sink are *Dope Comix* 4 and *Snarf* 9.

Dope 4 features stories about a variety of drugs: LSD (Michael T. Gilbert, Tim Boxell, Steve Stiles and Aline Kominski-Crumb), nicotine (Greg Irons) and Belladonna (Valentino). Also included is a front cover by Rand Holmes and "What Ever Happened to the Counter Culture?" by Jay Kinney.

Leslie Cabarga's color cover for *Snarf* 9 features the meeting of the Terrytoon mice with the Venus de Milo. Inside *Snarf* 9 are "Hell Isn't All that Bad" by Howard Cruse, a homage to Elvis Presley by Steve stiles, two Kim Deitch contributions, "Trials and Travels of Bert the Penguin" by Joel Beck, "Newspaper Story" by Joe "Stumps" Schwind, a recounting of the kidnapping of Charlie Chaplin's corpse by Rick Geary and a short contribution by Robert Crumb.

Both publications retail for $1.50.

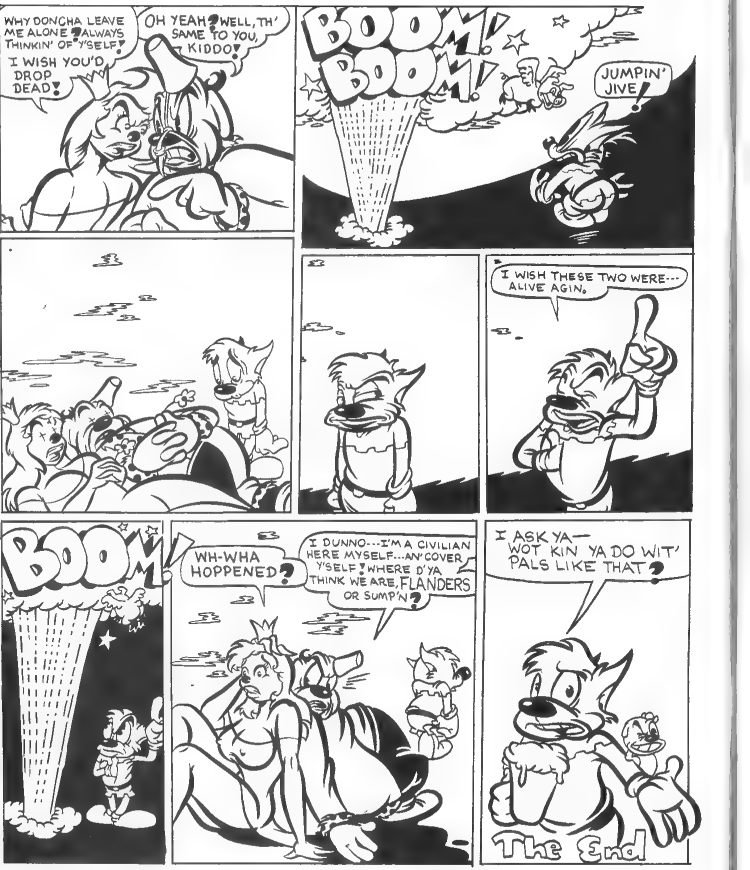
ELFQUEST

Elfquest's cover price is being raised to $1.50 beginning with issue 10. The price hike is due to increased printing costs.

Due in Mid-June, *Elfquest* 10. weaves "Homespun" (the Wendy Pini story in *Epic Illustrated* 1) into the Elfquest mythos, marks the beginning of Leetah's quest and introduces Petalwing the Preserver ("a most perverse and endearing spirit").

HUGO
the oat
in
"THEY DONE HIM WRONG"
by MILTON KNIGHT, JR.
:WHINE:
THAT WUZ A NICE LI'L WALK--- BUT IF I'M TOO LATE GETTIN' BACK TO TH' CASTLE, TH' KING'LL CROWN ME!
HODDEYA LIKE THAT? THAT POOR PUP'S STUCK IN TH' TREE!
WAL, S'LONG, PUP--
HOLD IT THERE, BOY!
WHAT DID YOU--- WELL, STRIKE ME SOCKLESS!
Y'GUESS IS CORRECT THERE, SOCKLESS! IN REAL LIFE, AHM, Y'FAIRY GODUNCLE! CALL ME UNCLE LOUIE! AHAHAH
--AN'AS A REWARD FO' Y'GREAT DEED--
BLEW!
AT DA TOOT-O-MAH TRUMPET, YOU NOW HAVE THREE WISHES!
JEE-CRIKEY! THIS OPPORTUNITY I CAN'T BLOW! WOT'LL I WISH FER?
TAKE Y'TIME, POPS! Y'WISHES ARE GOOD ANYOL' TIME! YOU KIN EVEN LET Y'FRIENZ USE 'EM, IF Y'WANT!
GWITE, NOW--- I GOTTA JAM SESSION WIT' GABRIEL T'DO!

HOT DAMN! THIS IS GRAND! AN' I DO MEAN GRANDOISE!
OH, THERE YOU ARE, HUGO! YOU WERE SO LATE FOR DINNER, DADDY FED YOUR PLATE TO TH' RATS!
AH, WELL—I DON'T LIKE PLATES, ANYWAY... I GOT THINGS TO TELL YA, TRISH!
TCH TCH— WHAT IS THAT BOY ON ABOUT NOW?
CRIMINAL ROUGE Romance's Finest
THREE WISHES?!
WOTTA WHACK! COULD I HAVE ONE OF 'EM? COULD I? HUH?
WELL... I...
OH, THERE YOU ARE, HUGO!
YOU WERE SO LATE FER DINNER, I FED YOUR PLATE TO TH' RATS!
AH, WELL... I DON'T LIKE PLATES, ANYWAY—
I GOT THINGS TO TELL YA, DADDY! HUGO'S GOT THREE WISHES COMIN' TO HIM, AN' HE'S GIVIN' ONE TO ME ON ACCOUNTA HE LOVES ME!
SWOOSH
THREE WISHES?! S'WONDERFUL! S'MOVELLOUS! AN' I'M, SURE GL' HUGO'LL GIVE ME ONE ON ACCOUNT OF... OF I'M TH' KING! HIS KING!
GULP! YEH! SHURE! BUT DEFINELY!
NOW, LEMME SEE... WOT'LL I WISH FER? HOW 'BOUT A DIAMOND STUDDED BRASSIERE? OR A PAIR OF GOLD GARTERS?
FOR THIS WE HAVE DAUGHTERS! HOW MORONIC CAN A MORON GET? WHYNCHA WISH FER SUMP'N USEFUL... LIKE A SET-O-HUNTIN' KNIVES... OR A COUPLA GUNS?
PULP!


WHY DONCHA LEAVE ME ALONE? ALWAYS THINKIN' OF Y'SELF?
I WISH YOU'D DROP DEAD!
OH YEAH? WELL, TH' SAME TO YOU, KIDDO!
BOOM! BOOM!
JUMPIN' JIVE!
I WISH THESE TWO WERE--- ALIVE AGIN.
BOOM
WH-WHA HOPPENED?
I DUNNO---I'M A CIVILIAN HERE MYSELF...AN' COVER Y'SELF! WHERE D'YA THINK WE ARE, FLANDERS OR SUMP'N?
I ASK YA— WOT KIN YA DO WIT' PALS LIKE THAT?
The End

BLOWTORCH
XI
©'81 m gumboy
GOOD RIDDANCE, BLOWTORCH!
THAT'S WHAT THEY THINK— I'VE GOT MORE LIVES THAN A FRUIT FLY! IT'S A GOOD THING LADY X FREED MY HANDS. NOW IF I COULD ONLY UNTIE MY ANKLES...
AIR! PHEW!
IT'S A COUPLE OF MILES TO SHORE. GEE, I'M NOT USED TO ALL THIS APVENTURE, DANGER, AND WORST OF ALL... EXERCISE! MISSING PERSONS AND MATRIMONIAL WORK ARE MORE MY LINE AS A DETECTIVE...SO WHY DID I TAKE THIS JOB? WAS IT...SOME DEEP-ROOTED PESIRE TO PROVE MYSELF? NAAH, IT WAS THE DOUGH! OH WELL, AT LEAST THE GOING'S SOFT FROM HERE.
MEANWHILE, BOUNCER AND HIS BOYS, REPLETE WITH THE BOOTY FROM HIS NEW WIFE, ARRIVE AT THEIR "HONEY-MOON" ISLAND...
WHADDAYA KNOW! A RECEPTION COMMITTEE!
WHO ARE THESE WEIRDOS, BOUNCER? REJECTS FROM "THE VILLAGE PEOPLE"?
WATCH THOSE SYLLABLES! DISCO SUCKS! RIGHT, AMOEBA?
NESTLÉ NO HER-SHEY'S!
HOW Y'ALL DOIN', Y'ALL! AH'M TEXAS.
WHAT PART OF THE SOUTH ARE YOU FROM, TEXAS?
WAIL, AH'M FROM THE SOUTH 'A NEW JERSEY, MA'AM... GOSHEN, N.J.! HEH... AN URBAN COW-BOY MAN. THAT'S ME! Y'ALL KNOW, HARD HAT NIGHTS AND HONKY TONK DAYS — OR WHATEVER?
AND THIS HERE'S "ESENEM"/ A REAL KOOK! YOU FELLERS- AND MA'AM'S- DIDN'T COME NONE TOO SOON... HE'S KINDA FUNNY, Y'ALL KNOW?
THAT DOES IT, COWBOY MAN!
ANY CRACK LIKE THAT FROM ANY OF YOU SUCKERS I'M NOT GONNA STAND FOR, Y'UNNERSTAND?
N-NOT THE BEST WAY TO S-START YOUR M-MOB BOUNCER!
I'LL TAME 'EM, SHRIMPY! DON'T YOU WORRY!
I WAS TRAPPED BY THIS MINDLESS EATING MACHINE! NO LONGER WAS I THE SUPERIOR "MAN"... THE SHARK CALLED THE SHOTS — I WAS IN HIS DOMAIN! LIKE THE HELPLESS MOUSE CORNERED BY THE HUNGRY SPIDER... LIKE THE STRUGGLING FLY CAUGHT IN THE MERCILESS CAT'S WEB... ALL I COULD DO WAS HOPE THE CREATURE NEVER SAW "JAWS"... OR EVEN "JAWS II"!
IF I CAN JUST HANG ON TO HIS BACK, I'LL BE SAFE... ASSUMING I DON'T NEED AIR, THAT IS! OWW! IT'S LIKE SANDPAPER— SLIPPING...
H-HE'S COMING!
Murad
—UHH...
OOO

Con't from pg. 10

reader once asked me if I thought writing a few comic books concerning the Ku Klux Klan would change the opinions of any of the members of that group. I don't think any number of books would, nor do I think anything I write here will persuade you or make you understand my major reason for writing the piece on fanzines. Since some of your work is dealt with as an example in that piece it would be difficult for you to view it objectively.

However, I do want to respond to your contention that I have maligned anyone who is not a writer or artist. You have distorted my line concerning beauty in the field of comics. The line reads: "I can't help but wonder if this man will ever add some beauty, wasted or otherwise, to the comics." End of quote. The line specifically pertains to what you might contribute to THE COMICS MEDIUM. It makes no reference to your personal life. Nor can such a line be construed to reflect on any audience. It is a very specific comment, not a general one, as you intimate.

Writing may only be a nervous disorder, for all I know. Or maybe it is the compulsion to be a story-teller, to give something to an audience. The only thing I truly know is that I try to keep it important to myself, even when it is two o'clock in the morning and the blank sheet of paper glares back at me. I feel it is important to give something, for whatever reasons, to give the best I have, at that point in time.

I find it mildly humorous that there has been so much furor over this portion of the article, from the kind of magazines that have so often delighted in lighting fires under other people. It seems when the heat rises under their burners, they squawk as loudly as any professional ever has.

"Say good night, Gracie."

"Good night, Gracie."

—Don McGregor

Con't from pg. 66

sizzling/screaming/scorching/scathing tumult about them, but this time something else, reaction from the serpent survivors.

Rocks showered about them like rain from clear heavens.

She ran, pulling Scott with her, and he nearly toppled, scrambling to keep up with her.

Greenliegh!" Scott shouted at her, over the tumult, as a third beam arced outward from behind them.

"Come on, Greenliegh!" Elena yelled. Greenliegh huddled near the rock wall and tried a chameleon impression. He failed, miserably, "Last call: follow us!! You aren't getting a second warning!" She looked back briefly, as they reached the ravine and it gaped treacherously underfoot. "I should have told you, I'm acutely against pain."

"I'm aware," Scott shouted back in reply, so that he might be heard above the sizzling/searing/screaming/ scorching/ scathing.

Boulders shattered the ledge like lightning tearing as thunder crashed encouragement.

Elena lowered herself into the ravine, supporting her weight with her arms while searching frantically with her boots for a foothold. She scraped desperately across the rough surface until the toe of her boot caught at last in a recess. She let her weight ease from her arms.

Her foot slipped!

Vertigo hit her with sickening force. Both hands clawed frantically for a hold. Her boots kicked at the rock, whipping sporadically into the air until, at last, she found another ridge to support her weight. She scraped her knees, and her recent dialogue with Scott about pain wasn't abstract any longer.

"How'd you know?" she yelled back as Greenliegh appeared above. "How'd you know my attitude on pain?"

"You've mentioned it once or twice, in the past decade or so," Scott said trying to move gracefully from one ridge to the other and stumbling, instead.

"Oh," she said and then smiled, surprising herself "which past decade are we talking about?"

He stopped, out of breath, but the question seemed to have import to him. He did not hear the levity in her voice.

"Ours, I hope." he said quietly, and at first she did not comprehend.

And then, she did.

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BLOWTORCH
XII
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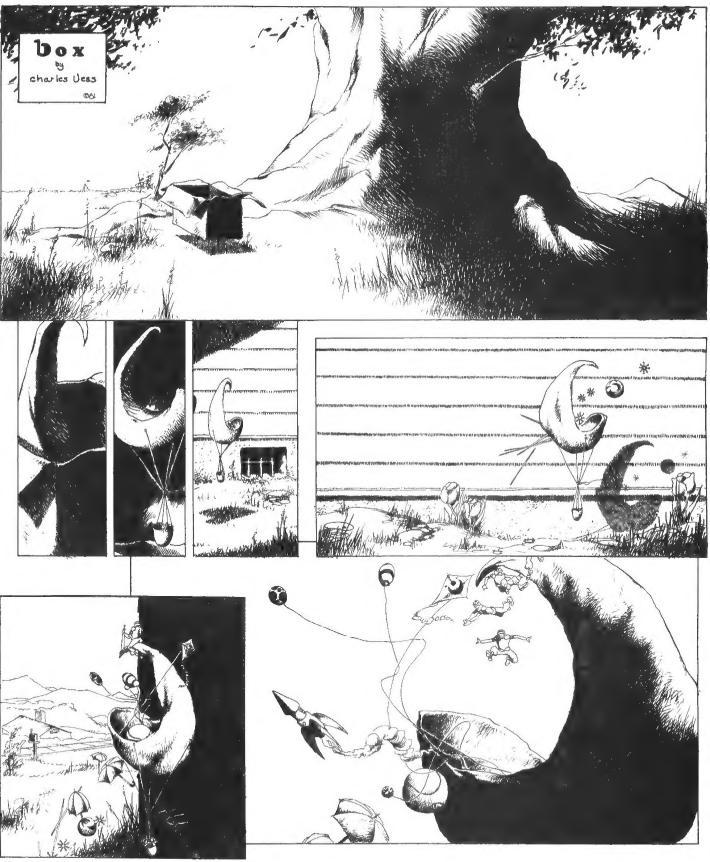
Murad
LADY X! I... UHH...MUST HAVE BLACKED OUT—BEEN WASHED ASHORE!
YOUR SWEATER'S OVER THERE. IT WAS WATER-LOGGED, SO I TOOK IT OFF.
ARE YOU SURE THAT'S —HEE HEE!— ALL YOU TOOK OFF?
DON'T BE AN ASS, BLOWTORCH. WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT BOUNCER AND HIS MEN—WE'RE STUCK ON THIS ISLAND WITH THEM!
WHY DON'T WE HIGH-TAIL IT OUT OF HERE?
NOT ON YOUR LIFE! I'VE REMOVED ESSENTIAL PARTS OF THEIR BOATS! NEITHER THEY CAN LEAVE...NOR CAN YOU! THAT IS NOT UNTIL YOU FINISH YOUR JOB! YOU LET THEM MURDER WEEDE—HOW YOU TAKE CARE OF THEM!
HERE WE ARE, BABE—THE HONEY-MOON SUITE!
DO YOU TAKE ME FOR A FOOL, BOUNCER? YOU BRING ME TO THIS RUN-DOWN SHACK IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE WITH A BUNCH OF YOUR GOONY FRIENDS! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
C-CAN'T YOU G-GUESS, VOGUE? B-BOUNCER INTENDS TO MAKE H-HIS CRIME BASE IN THIS REMOTE ISLE...
SHUT UP, SHRIMPY!
SO THAT'S IT! I NEVER BELIEVED YOU'D GO AHEAD WITH THAT SILLY NOTION OF YOURS! YOU MARRIED ME FOR MY MONEY...
H-HOW COULD YOU! OH, HOW COULD YOU!!
I WANTED TO KEEP IT FROM YOU, VOGUE...I THOUGHT MAYBE I COULD GET YOU TO SEE MY SIDE LATER. BUT I DON'T THINK YOU'LL EVER GO FOR THE IDEA NOW... STOP HITTING ME!
IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE, YOU'LL DO AS I SAY, SEE? THERE'S NO ONE AROUND HERE WHO COULD HELP YOU...
I SAY! ER...UNHAND THE LADY, YOU BRUTE!
OWW, YOU'RE HURTING ME, YOU DIRTY... PIP! H-HELP...
I TOLD YOU YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE BROUGHT YOUR BUTLER HERE, YOU SPOILED SLUT!
BLAM!
WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, CROAK THE BROAD—SHE'LL ONLY BRING YOU TROUBLE!
MAYBE YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING THERE, ESE-NEM!
W-WHAT? BOUNCER ...YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!
KILL HER! HYAH-HYAH!! KILL THE WITCH!
NESTLE'S NO HERSHEY!
HONEY... PLEASE...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